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Department of Education

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Honourable Scott Reid, MHA

SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

Department of Education

Chair: Perry Trimper, MHA

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Appearing:

Department of Education

Hon. Tom Osborne, MHA, Minister
Eldred Barnes, Associate Deputy Minister
Susan Elliott, Executive Assistant
Brian Evans, Assistant Deputy Minister, K-12 & Early Childhood Development
Bob Gardiner, Deputy Minister
Robyn Hayes, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services and School Infrastructure
Jacquelyn Howard, Director of Communications
Tracy Stamp, Departmental Controller
Mary Goss-Prowse, Director, Early Learning and Child Development
Candice Ennis-Williams, Assistant Deputy Minister, Post-Secondary Education

Also Present

Hon. Derek Bennett, MHA, Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Municipalities
Hon. Steve Crocker, MHA, Minister of Justice and Public Safety
Hon. Lisa Dempster, MHA, Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation
Paul Dinn, MHA
Paul Lane, MHA
Hon. Elvis Loveless, MHA, Minister of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture
Darrell Hynes, Senior Research Analyst, Official Opposition Office
Scott Fleming, Researcher, Third Party Office

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Derek Bennett, MHA for Lewisporte - Twillingate, substitutes for Carol Anne Haley, MHA for Burin - Grand Bank.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Steve Crocker, MHA for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde, substitutes for Sherry Gambin-Walsh, MHA for Placentia - St. Mary's.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Lisa Dempster, MHA for Cartwright - L'Anse au Clair, substitutes for Pam Parsons, MHA for Harbour Grace - Port de Grave.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Elvis Loveless, MHA for Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune, substitutes for Christopher Mitchelmore, MHA for St. Barbe - L'Anse aux Meadows.

Pursuant to Standing Order 68, Paul Dinn, MHA for Topsail - Paradise, substitutes for Helen Conway Ottenheimer, MHA for Harbour Main.

The Committee met at 9 a.m. in the Assembly Chamber.

CHAIR (Trimper): Okay, well good morning, everyone.

Welcome to this Estimates review of the Department of Education within the Social Services sector. I am Perry Trimper, I'm the MHA for Lake Melville, and I've been chairing all the departments that fall within this grouping of our government departments.

This morning we are being broadcast and I would remind all members participating, especially for those who may be new to sitting on the floor, to identify yourself. What we're asking folks to do is to raise your hand, identify who you are and Broadcast will find you, if you've been asked to answer a question. Each time when you respond, please just say your name. As we get into it, I find the formalities tend to disintegrate as we go back and forth, and that's fine, but just give the Broadcast folks a few seconds.

So we'll start with 15 minutes to the minister and then 15 minutes for the Opposition, the main Opposition critic, to have a few words, then we'll be calling the headings. We'll go through

each of them in sequence and we'll be voting on them as we go.

At about an hour and a half, or halfway through, we'll take a 15-minute break to give everybody a chance to stretch. If you have any other occasion to want to get up and leave your chair, we'd ask you to please wear a mask, and that's fine, please proceed.

So with that, I'm going to turn it to the Minister of Education to please introduce his team and have a few opening remarks.

Sir.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As you know, I'm Tom Osborne. I will start to my right with Eldred Barnes and then I guess we'll go to our deputy and have staff introduce themselves.

MR. BARNES: Eldred Barnes, lead for the Education Action Plan.

MR. GARDINER: Bob Gardiner, Deputy Minister.

MS. HAYES: Robyn Hayes, Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services.

MS. HOWARD: Jacquelyn Howard, Director of Communications.

MS. ENNIS-WILLIAMS: Hi, it's Candice Ennis-Williams, ADM, Post-Secondary Education.

MS. STAMP: Good morning. Tracy Stamp, Departmental Controller.

MR. EVANS: Brian Evans, Assistant Deputy Minister, K-12 and Early Childhood Development.

MS. GOSS-PROWSE: Mary Goss-Prowse, I'm Director of Early Learning and Child Development.

MS. ELLIOTT: Susan Elliott, Executive Assistant to Minister Osborne.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you.

I'm not going to take any time with opening remarks. I guess my Opposition critics hear me often enough speaking and I can wax, as they know, but today I'll get straight to business and open it for questions.

CHAIR: Okay. I'll turn to my right and then I'll ask MHA Coady to please introduce himself. We'll go across the room and then, Sir, you can have some opening remarks.

MR. PARDY: Craig Pardy.

CHAIR: Pardy, I'm sorry.

MR. PARDY: It's okay, it's close.

On my left here is Darrell Hynes. Darrell is a researcher with the Opposition Party.

On my right is – I'm assuming we can use the names now in this Chamber –

CHAIR: Yes, you can in this one.

MR. PARDY: – Paul Dinn. Paul is the MHA. Last year, his critic role was with the post-secondary, so he's most interested in today's proceedings as well.

CHAIR: They can introduce themselves, please.

If you want to carry on, Sir, here.

MR. J. DINN: Hi, Jim Dinn, MHA for St. John's Centre.

To my left is Scott Fleming, one of our researchers.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Minister Crocker, just need to introduce yourself when your light comes on, Sir.

MR. CROCKER: Steve Crocker, MHA for Carbonear - Trinity - Bay de Verde.

MR. LOVELESS: Elvis Loveless, MHA, Fortune Bay - Cape La Hune.

MR. BENNETT: Derek Bennett, MHA, Lewisporte - Twillingate.

MS. DEMPSTER: Lisa Dempster, MHA for the beautiful District of Cartwright – L'Anse au Clair.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Okay, MHA Pardy – I was mixing Craig and Pardy with Coady. Anyway, I apologize for that. It won't happen again.

Sir, you may commence.

MR. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR: I'm sorry; we will call the first section and headings first.

MR. PARDY: I just have a little short preamble.

CHAIR: Yeah, we're going to call the section headings and then we'll let you go.

MR. PARDY: Okay.

CLERK (Russell): 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Please proceed with the preamble.

MR. PARDY: I feel like a veteran now after experiencing last year's Estimates. It is quite the privilege to be here and to ask questions related to the budget. Sixteen years in administration I knew many, from Bob and Eldred from my school days, to what we did. It's great to be here to ask questions on items that were so significant to the K-to-12 education system.

Tuesday, September 15, I had a talk within this Chamber. I gave a historical account of the funding from education and health care. I know that you can't compare health care back in the '80s to what health care would be here in the current year we are in. I'm quite aware that we're not comparing apples and apples. One thing I did state at that time, that we were left behind in the dust with education within the portion of the overall budget of the government.

I used the words and stated this on September 15: That education is underfunded, but to qualify

that a little more, our goal would be in the times that we find ourselves in to make sure that we can find efficiencies within our system that we currently have in order to make the K-to-12 system and the post-secondary system as efficient, and for us to achieve our goal of student achievement along. I do look forward to the proceeding.

We'll start with some general questions, if I may.

CHAIR: Yes, thank you.

MR. PARDY: Is it possible to get a copy of the minister's briefing binder after?

Would there be any errors in the published Estimates book?

MR. OSBORNE: Not that I know of.

MR. PARDY: Everything is as ...

How many people are employed in the department?

MR. GARDINER: Right now there are 212 people employed in the department.

MR. PARDY: Would you have the number employed in the school board as well, NLESD?

MR. GARDINER: I wouldn't have it off the top of my head. Are you talking about the district office in particular or all inclusive, including teachers and custodians –?

MR. PARDY: No, not teachers. Just the district office.

MR. GARDINER: We can certainly get that for you, yes.

MR. PARDY: Can you give an estimate seeing we're in Estimates?

MR. GARDINER: It depends on what you include. There would be four executive and then, of course, you would have the directors of schools. Off the top of my head, Craig, I'd say it's probably around 20 directors of schools; Program specialists: There would probably

around 30. We can get the exact numbers for you.

Then, of course, if you want to get into what you're going to call district staff, there are 22 deaf and hard of hearing itinerant teachers. Are they district staff? They operate out of the districts but they provide services to schools. There are 18 blind, visually impaired itinerants, there are 45 speech-language pathologists and there are 43 educational psychologists. I think there are 10 itinerant teachers for Student Support Services. That includes Safe and Caring Schools, as well as autism. I'm probably missing a couple, Craig.

MR. PARDY: That's highly commendable.

I think online, Bob, it states there are 371. If you tally online with the three districts and there are the three, we'll say, regional offices, counting the Avalon, Central and West, 371 are the names in the ...

MR. GARDINER: So if you do that, Craig, then now you're talking about secretaries.

MR. PARDY: Yes, okay.

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

Craig, just to be clear, the numbers I just gave you were district staff, I'm going to say educators.

MR. PARDY: Yes.

MR. GARDINER: That wouldn't include managers of HR or those types of things. We can get an exact number for you, absolutely.

MR. PARDY: Okay.

Did the department receive any funds from the contingency fund this year? The government has a contingency fund of \$200 million. Did we access any money from that contingency fund this year?

MR. GARDINER: We would've gotten \$20.3 million for the Chromebooks and laptops for the technology plan. Subsequent to that as well, Craig, there would've been \$26.1 million from the federal Safe Restart for schools. That

wouldn't have come directly from the province's contingency fund, but that would've certainly been part of our contingency operations.

MR. PARDY: Mr. Chair, do I need to state my name every time?

CHAIR: No, my observation of how the broadcast is able to follow it, there's a sort of a relationship. In terms of the conversation going, you don't need to, but when we switch speakers, then it's helpful to start off that way.

MR. PARDY: May I ask on the \$26 million, where the money has been expended? I know school buses would be a significant portion of that. How much? Do we have the numbers or approximate numbers?

MR. GARDINER: I can give you the approximate numbers and, of course, it's a bit of a moving target depending on where the need would be. Keep in mind that we would receive \$13 million of this up front and then the other \$13 million post-December, once we report. It's simply a reporting exercise what the first \$13 million was expended on.

There's \$1.35 million for the 15 additional administrator units and \$2.5 million for the 25 additional guidance counsellor units. There's also a cost of approximately \$1.1 million for the term contracts whereby we put the 70 substitute teachers in place, interim contracts.

As you'd know Craig, when a substitute teacher is hired in the term contract, they get the higher rate of pay and the benefits, et cetera. Even though we're not anticipating extra costs because we have the 70 teachers, those will be normally called in anyway. It's really logistics but we do have the extra costs because of the higher rate of pay and benefits, et cetera. It's about \$1.1 million.

Then there are other expenditures there for custodians, bus cleaning. The additional bus runs we've budgeted at around \$10.5 million and, again, that could change obviously. We have 10 teachers at a cost of \$1.6 million for remote learning. There's an additional \$1.6 million for student assistants and there's \$350,000 for occupational health and safety and human resource pressures. Then we've also

budgeted up to \$250,000, so that's all English School District.

MR. PARDY: Yes.

MR. GARDINER: Then we've also budgeted approximately – and, again, it depends on the need and the usage – up to \$250,000 for the francophone school district.

MR. PARDY: We can go to our 1.1.01 now, our first line on the Salaries. I'm just noticing an increase in the Salaries for the Minister's Office. If we can just get an accounting of the increase there.

MR. GARDINER: Basically, there's a \$1,400 increase there. What that accounts for is the fact that post-election the minister of the day was no longer the minister. There's a transition period whereby we carry his salary for a short period of time, so that's the extra \$1,400.

MR. PARDY: Okay.

Transportation and Communications: Last year, I think there was \$5,608 less spent compared to what was budgeted. I know that we're talking about an atypical year. I would assume next year would be an atypical year because COVID will be affecting next year's budget more so than this year. Even though there's a little sliver in there, I'm sure some of this would account for, maybe, the unusual or atypical year that we've had.

I put that out there as a preamble or preface for a lot of the comments because I'm sure a lot of it is impacted slightly by what we've done, even though our year is only going to March 31, this particular budget.

MR. GARDINER: Yeah, so basically the obvious answer is that there's lower than anticipated travel cost in this particular case. Keep in mind that, as you mentioned, this budget year ended March 31, 2020, and really there's only about a two- to three-week impact of COVID on this particular budget. But, as you can appreciate, the Transportation and Communications budget line for the Minister's Office would be variable and, again, it depends on where the minister lives. So for part of the year we had the minister from Grand Falls-Windsor and the other part of the year we had

the minister from Springdale. Again, it's a variable budget, so \$5,600 on a \$32,000 budget is a significant difference of money.

MR. PARDY: No, I agree.

On the Salaries for Executive Support, again, not a large but a significant overrun there.

MR. GARDINER: Basically, the reason for that was, as we noted last year, there was a special advisor to the Education Action Plan who was hired about a year and a half or a couple of years ago, so that's a part of the explanation for the extra salary expenditure. Worthy to note, that contract actually ended on August 31. That person concluded his duties. As well, there's a step differential for the director of communications and other step increases.

MR. PARDY: Bob, you also mentioned earlier about the money for the technology.

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. PARDY: Can you provide a quick update on the technology? I think the minister said in his briefing that I think we expect the Chromebooks very shortly.

MR. GARDINER: So laptops have started arriving. They are in Labrador now as we speak and then they will be configured and inventoried and sent out to teachers. Other regions, right now what I was told was they were supposed to come across on the ferry, if not yesterday, the day before yesterday and they will be delivered to the various regions: Western, Central and then, obviously, Eastern here in the city. Again, there will be a process to configure them, mirror them, et cetera, the IT protocols and then inventoried and distributed to teachers.

The district is expecting the Chromebooks likely closer to the end of this month. As you can appreciate, there was an order for approximately 30,000 Chromebooks, so obviously there are supply and distribution complexities with such a large order. They're expecting them towards the end of October. That said, if there needs to be a school closure or a region that closed down, the district would have sufficient inventory right now in their normal inventory that would be able

to hold a region over quite easily for a short period of time.

MR. PARDY: Bob, might I also ask what the estimate or time expectancy would be to configure these, all this technology?

MR. GARDINER: Yes, so that's something that's done fairly quickly because it's just a standard procedure. It's not labour intensive; it's simply plug it in, let it run its course and then ship it out.

MR. PARDY: Okay. Time frame, nothing significant here?

MR. GARDINER: No. Certainly, teachers should have their laptops, I'm going to say, before the end of October and then students, certainly, with their Chromebooks before the end of December at the latest.

MR. PARDY: Good. Thank you.

How many students did not report to school in September of this year? When I say from the expectation – I know that, I think, last year we mentioned, Bob, that we probably have a declining enrolment in our school system, about 1,000 students a year. I'm assuming this September would've exceeded that, conceivably.

MR. GARDINER: Two different questions, really, Craig, because if we're looking at –

MR. PARDY: General attrition.

MR. GARDINER: Yes. If we're looking at declining enrolment, then, of course, as you'd know, that would be one AGR session to the next AGR session and that would be our number. Last year, for example, there would've been about 700 fewer students, so we would've been expecting 700 fewer students based on the AGR results.

The school district will say that their home-schooling inquiries are up; however, the number of students that are actually availing of home-schooling hasn't increased significantly. They're still trying to nail that number down.

In terms of attendance, Tony Stack, the director of the English School District, has said that last

week the attendance was about 90 per cent. Late last week, it was closer to the high 80s and the last time I spoke to him, yesterday, he said it was around 90 per cent again. So that's the attendance of people who are showing up to school.

MR. PARDY: So we can assume that the 10 per cent are in limbo, waiting for home-schooling or remote learning.

MR. GARDINER: No, no. The 10 per cent would be normal absences right now.

MR. PARDY: Okay. All right.

Are there any teachers or staff that did not return in September due to COVID concerns or fears?

MR. GARDINER: Not to my knowledge. That's not to say that they – I mean, there likely would be teachers off on sick leave for a variety of reasons. COVID-related I wouldn't be able to tell you, Craig. It hasn't presented itself as an issue. The district hasn't raised it as an issue.

MR. PARDY: If it was an issue, I'm sure you would know.

MR. GARDINER: I would hope so.

MR. PARDY: So at least that puts it in the right frame; that's the positive frame.

You had mentioned last year in the Estimates that – I think you referenced Stats Canada – our teacher-pupil ratio of 12.5. I find it very tough to get my head around that, Bob, when I look at that statistic, knowing it came from the system when we look at class sizes. I keep thinking on that number. I'll probably never forget it as long as I live.

If someone said that the teacher-pupil ratio in my career was 12.5, I really would take strong exception to that. I was a little startled, but I'll never forget that number. I know that in an entirety, when we look at rural, urban and we look at all our teachers that we have, I'm sure that's where the number would come from. Have we changed in that?

MR. GARDINER: I'm going to startle you a little bit more now, Craig.

MR. PARDY: I'm easily startled.

MR. GARDINER: Again, when I go back and try and find the latest Stats Canada numbers – and as I said last year I was just doing it off the top of my head, but I did look. The latest numbers from Stats Canada, which is really the only numbers we can use from a comparison perspective, because they have a methodology that's used that's consistent; a very rigorous process whereby they collect the data from the provinces and territories and ultimately report on it.

Unfortunately, the latest comparable data that we would have would be from 2010-2011, which is 10 years old. At the time, actually what they reported as a student-teacher ratio for Newfoundland and Labrador was 11.8, which was the lowest in the country, with a Canadian average of 13.8. That's the latest comparable data. Now, they would include in that likely – and I can't confirm but they would likely include in that all educators, which would include your program specialists, et cetera.

So if you just do the quick math for Newfoundland and Labrador this current school year, using a student population of 63,722, which is the number of students that were reported on the AGR last year, our actual – and this is just using teachers, this is not using program specialists or executive at the board or anything like that; it doesn't include the itinerant teachers that would be providing services directly to students. But if you use the 63,722 students, our student-teacher ratio would be 11.69.

It's hard to find comparable data; however, if you look at Nova Scotia that reports 123,239 students and 9,456.5 teachers. Craig, for comparison purposes, it's hard to know what's actually in that because it's just saying teachers. Their ratio would be 13-1. Their latest '10-'11 data from Stats Canada was actually 12.9-1, so it's probably pretty close to the 13.

MR. PARDY: Ten per cent absenteeism. That is, I'm assuming, par for the course? I know we've gone back to the AG report and I know that we're actioning that and working towards getting those students back into the school, but is that around what we would expect?

MR. GARDINER: I would suggest that 10 per cent would be a little high. If you recall from the Child and Youth Advocate report, she used 10 per cent for a particular student as chronic absenteeism, as opposed to 10 per cent across the board.

I would suggest, Craig, that typically the absentee rate – and we can get better data on this – for K to 6, K to 8 would probably be closer to 5 or 6 per cent. In high school, as you can appreciate, it's probably closer to 8 to 10 per cent. Overall, 10 per cent might be a little bit high. I'd say normally it would probably be 7 or 8 per cent on any given day.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you very much.

Mr. Pardy, your time has expired for this current round.

I'll turn it over to MHA Jim Dinn. Please start the next 10-minute questions.

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Back to the contingency fund – and I'll start with a few general questions and just pick up on one or two things that my colleague had asked. With regard to the money that's gone into the education restart and safe opening schools, other than the \$20.3 million for laptops – which, by the way, is a significant amount and I commend the government for taking that action. There are no two ways about it, it's about time we moved into the 21st century and put our money where our mouth is. I appreciate that.

Is there any other provincial funding that has gone into the restart in addition to the budget from the provincial side for the Safe Restart of schools? I know we had \$20.3 million for laptops and \$26.1 million, I think you said, for the federal Safe Restart program. Other than that, is there any other funding that's going into the education system in light of COVID-19?

MR. GARDINER: No, not to my knowledge, Jim. That would be it right now.

MR. J. DINN: That would be it. Okay.

How would that compare then to other areas? I think of the contingency fund that was used for

COVID. How would the \$20.3 million then compare to other sectors of the economy? Would it be more or less in line, less than what we would expect or a bit more than what we would expect?

MR. GARDINER: I can't speak for the other departments, Jim; I'm not intimately familiar with it. I will say that the \$20.3 million can't be looked at out of context with the \$26 million that the federal is also providing. The total would be more than \$46 million.

MR. J. DINN: No and I appreciate that. I guess I'm looking at what the province itself has invested.

With regard to the \$1.35 million for extra administrator units, where were they deployed mostly? What would be the breakdown? Mostly rural? Would it be mostly in the urban areas? How would that have worked out? Where would I find these units?

MR. GARDINER: Essentially, what would have happened there, Jim, is the administrative allocation that was implemented in 2008, we would have went back to that administrative allocation. In that case there was typically an extra quarter unit, so basically it was a top-up for administrators in the four different ranges of schools. Instead of 1½ administrative units, it would be 1¾. It was spread across the province because there were some changes there for small schools as well as some of the larger schools.

MR. J. DINN: Would it be fair to say then that all schools benefited or would there be some schools that would have received no benefit in terms of this?

MR. GARDINER: All schools certainly would not have benefited, it would have simply replaced the allocation – reinstated the allocation that was in place in 2008.

MR. J. DINN: Will we be able to have a breakdown of those schools that actually had the increase? Would it be possible to get that?

MR. GARDINER: That would not be a problem.

MR. J. DINN: Thank you.

With regard to the \$2.5 million for extra guidance counsellor units, again, is it fair to say that was based on a ratio of 1-333 students? I'm just trying to figure out how they were allocated.

MR. GARDINER: Yes, so that would be the allocation model that was recommended in 2008. It's technically 1-333, but there was a rounding provision that was suggested in the report itself whereby if it's between one and 1½ it's rounded. If it's less than one, it is what it is. If it's between one and 1½ it's rounded down to one and if it's between 1½ and two it's rounded down to 1½. That was the recommendation from the Shortall report in 2008. That was the premise of those extra units.

MR. J. DINN: Would it again be possible to have a list of the schools that benefited from that as well, please?

MR. GARDINER: Yes, that's certainly possible to do.

MR. J. DINN: With regard to that, was there any allowance made for guidance counsellors who have multiple schools across large geographic areas? I can think in terms of the schools that I've visited where some school counsellors had five schools or two schools. Let's say the numbers in those schools don't reach the threshold of 333, but they might have 500 students between the two schools or the three schools. Is there any allowance for those school counsellors or any increase in the allocation in those cases? Because they still have the workload, plus the geography.

MR. GARDINER: Jim, the easy answer to that is once the allocation was revised – and in many cases it was simply a top-up, because if I was a guidance counsellor responsible for 500 students, that may have equated to five schools; if now I'm responsible for 333 students, then that may now equate to three schools. That's the way it was done. In most cases it was a top-up.

MR. J. DINN: If there were, indeed, five schools, let's say 250 students each, roughly – I'm just picking a number. If a school counsellor then hypothetically was responsible for five schools, then what you're saying is that those schools would be divided between two counsellors. Would that be fair enough?

MR. GARDINER: That would be the model, yes.

MR. J. DINN: Okay because I've heard from a few that's not the case. As this school counsellor said, they're drowning and they haven't received the extra. I think that's something that might need to be checked out; I'm not sure how it's actually working out.

With regard to custodians, have there been problems getting custodians hired? I understand that last week or the week before there was actually difficulty getting custodians in, that they hadn't completed the hiring. Is the hiring for custodians completed? Is there a full complement or are there any problems with regard to the hiring of custodians for schools?

MR. GARDINER: We're not aware of any problems right now with respect to hiring. With respect to a full complement, like any position, you're going to have vacancies throughout the year, but it hasn't been flagged as an issue right now.

MR. J. DINN: Okay.

The \$10.5 million for busing: I think there was a recent news report that the busing budget was actually increased; that it actually had gone up to something like \$12 million or \$13 million. Is that the case? That to resolve the busing issue for COVID-19 the budget is actually more than \$10.5 million.

MR. GARDINER: No, there's \$10.5 million in the budget for busing.

MR. J. DINN: Has it cost more than that or that's what it cost? I know that's what's in the budget but has it gone over budget to get the extra? Are you aware of the breakdown?

MR. GARDINER: We are not aware of any difference of that.

MR. J. DINN: The \$1.6 million for the 10 teachers, I think that's the deal with the students who are immunocompromised. How is that proceeding?

MR. GARDINER: The district is currently in the recruitment process. Last week, they had, I

think it was, three in place. They had one assigned to K to 6 and one assigned to 7 to 9. Of course, as you know, it would be the CDLI that would be taking care of the high school pieces.

Right now, the demand hasn't been that great in terms of what the requests have been. They're not behind. As the requests are coming in, they're processing them. There are no outstanding requests right now, to my knowledge, to be processed.

MR. J. DINN: So those teachers have been hired, all of them, have they?

MR. GARDINER: They are in the process of being hired right now, yeah.

MR. J. DINN: Okay. How many have been hired so far?

MR. GARDINER: The last I heard was three.

MR. J. DINN: Three out of the 10?

MR. GARDINER: Out of 10.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, when do we expect those to be hired? While there's no demand, we could very well be in a place where we have demand. What's the timeline?

MR. GARDINER: We've been told that they would be hired within the next couple of weeks.

MR. J. DINN: Within the next –

MR. GARDINER: Yeah.

MR. J. DINN: So before the end of October?

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. J. DINN: Where would they be housed? I know CDLI is the high school component but how will this work? Where will they be assigned?

MR. GARDINER: To my knowledge, there's no geographical boundary per se, it's wherever they happen to be.

MR. J. DINN: No, and that's what I'm asking. I understand that, because I would assume that

these teachers will be working from a central location somewhere where they'll be teaching virtually some. I would assume that's correct.

MR. GARDINER: It wouldn't be restricted by location, but certainly a couple or three hubs wouldn't hurt. If the connectivity was there, it wouldn't preclude somebody from working out of Labrador.

MR. J. DINN: Do we have sites available where we know where these teachers will be working from? Because that's going to be the aspect of it, the virtual aspect of it.

MR. GARDINER: We have regional offices as well as 260 schools in the province, so they can work out of schools as well.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, so they can. That's what I'm trying to figure out, where they'll be located. They won't be simply in one area.

MR. GARDINER: That won't be a requirement.

MR. J. DINN: No, okay.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Perhaps, Mr. Dinn, we'll pause there and I'll turn back to Mr. Pardy to continue on for 10 minutes.

Thank you.

MR. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm through with section one.

CHAIR: Okay, well, thank you. Any further questions on section one, Mr. Dinn?

MR. J. DINN: Yes, (inaudible).

I do have one question for Mr. Gardiner. On May 27, he was sent a report from the district. I'm just wondering what he did with that report after he received it, because that's been a source of concern. That was the task force report from the Eastern School District and that was sent to you on May 27 by Mr. Stack. What happened to that?

MR. GARDINER: So, Jim, that's was an integral part of our discussions following May 27, which helped inform the department's plan, which was released on July 6. Again, this was a piece of work that the school district undertook throughout the month – later in April and early part of May when we were at Alert Level 4 and significant thought and ideas went in in terms of how we could move through the COVID situation we were in. At that time, we weren't even sure if we were going to open schools again towards the end of June.

In the cover letter to that particular report, it states that this is a compilation of ideas. This is not a plan; this is to inform a plan. Subsequent to May 27, we had significant discussions with both school districts and the NLTA and then ultimately arrived with a departmental plan of July 6, which helped inform the CSFP and NLESD's safe school reopening plans.

MR. J. DINN: Did you share this report with the minister, other departments? Did you keep it to yourself? Because it does ask for some specific information here with regards to guidance from the chief medical officer of Health, sufficient funding to provide access to technology, direction from the Department of Education with respect to modified curricular requirements and, most importantly, that it would need a significant additional staff and school infrastructure if, indeed, Learning Model 1 was the preferred option of having every student back.

I'm just wondering what happened to it? Did it stay in your desk? Did you keep it? Did you pass it on? Did you discuss it with those in the department? I'm just trying to get an idea of what happened to that report, because for the longest while we were under the assumption that there was no report.

CHAIR: Minister.

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you.

Jim, that report, as I've indicated on a number of occasions publicly, was used to formulate the plan. I should ask you are you in favour of having teachers come in early and go home late, because that was also one of the ideas in the

report, but the report was a compilation, a wide arrangement of ideas that led to a plan.

Yes, the chief medical officer of health was involved, Public Health was involved, the department was involved and the stakeholders that were required to put a plan together were all involved.

MR. J. DINN: Again, it's a simple question, Chair: What did Mr. Gardiner do with the report?

I understand that everyone was involved; I understand it was a task force report. There are many things that are in the back-to-school plan right now, I think, where teachers are contributing above and beyond their expectations because that's what teachers do. I've taught for 32 years, I do know what teachers do. I was president of the association for four years; I know what teachers are willing to do.

What I do want to know is when a report is sent to and received by the deputy minister, what did he do with it? It's a simple question. Did he kept it – and it's not a matter of who was involved, I want to know what was done with it; with whom did he share it?

MR. OSBORNE: Jim, that report was used to formulate a plan. So that's what was done with the report. The report didn't sit idle. The report was received in May and within five or six weeks government announced the return to school plan. So it didn't sit idle. It didn't sit on anybody's desk. It was used to formulate the plan. It was a pretty quick turnaround to have a report from the school district in May and the first week of July have a plan announced.

MR. J. DINN: Chair, I still haven't got the answer, but the fact is I can't help but think that if that plan was put out for public consumption, certainly, or that task force report, even in June, a month after it had been delivered, we would've had a very different discussion around the plan and a very different set of consultations as well, because we were left certainly scrambling at the end of it.

I should point out that many of the ideas that have come from the department, whether it's the

use of school nurses, the extra substitute teachers, were ideas that my colleague from Bonavista and I presented the former minister of Education and also shared with you, Minister, on this. This was the 1st of August because we were very concerned about the effect that there was no real plan for the opening of schools in August.

I'm trying to find out here because it's a serious problem as to what – if it sat on the desk, if it was used to inform a plan, then I certainly would like to know with whom was it shared and were people aware of it. There seems to be an unwillingness to even allow the deputy minister to answer that question.

I'll move on. Obviously, I'm not getting an answer here and there seems to be an effort to keep –

CHAIR: I guess just to clarify my role. What I'll do is ensure that you have an opportunity to ask the question. They provided two answers to that question. I suggest that we move on.

MR. J. DINN: Yeah.

With regard to this, just to confirm, teachers will have their laptops before the end of October with all the necessary software on it? Is that correct?

MR. GARDINER: That's the plan, Jim. They're arriving at central locations in the regions as we speak.

MR. J. DINN: Okay.

The Chromebooks again, for students, by the end of December?

MR. GARDINER: That's certainly the plan right now, barring any unforeseen circumstances.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, because I was certainly led to believe by officials in previous meetings that it would be by September. I had my doubts about that, but that's fair enough. So we are looking at by the end of December.

With regard to schools and cleaning: How many schools within the district have – and I'm

thinking large schools now – I'm looking at the custodians throughout the day from 7 o'clock, let's say, until 3 o'clock in the afternoon or a normal day when school is in session.

How many schools have more than one person on at that time? Do you have a breakdown of the number of custodians per school?

MR. GARDINER: Jim that would not be something that the department would have. All I can comment on is the fact that the English School District have increased hours, hired extra custodians to meet the guidelines of public health officials and they haven't raised it as an issue. In terms of the exact number of hours per school, that's something that we wouldn't have.

MR. J. DINN: Cleaning supplies for schools and the school budgets: Has extra funding been provided to the school boards for the extra cleaning supplies that they need? I'm thinking in terms of – because what I'm hearing is that right now schools are actually dipping into their own operating funds to provide the necessary cleaning equipment and there's a concern they'll exhaust whatever funds they have for other things.

I'm just wondering how is this – the funding to the district, because there are extra cleaning protocols for the cleaning of keyboards, desks and so on and so forth.

MR. GARDINER: There was extra funding provided to the district as part of the \$26-million federal funding for cleaning, custodians, et cetera.

MR. J. DINN: How much was it again? Sorry, that's one number I didn't get.

MR. GARDINER: Custodians was \$4.15 million.

MR. J. DINN: \$4.15 million and that's for custodians, the extra hours and all necessary cleaning products?

MR. GARDINER: Correct.

MR. J. DINN: Would it be possible to get an idea of the breakdown of just how much was

spent on cleaning products as opposed to the custodians?

MR. GARDINER: We can certainly ask for that for you.

MR. J. DINN: Please. I appreciate it.

I'll leave it at that for now, Sir.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you, Mr. Dinn.

At this time, I'll turn to MHA for Mount Pearl - Southlands, Paul Lane, who is not a Member of this Committee but knowing him as I've been - this is my fourth Estimates; I suspect he's interested in asking some questions.

Does this gentleman have leave? I look to my Committee Members if he has leave and provide your consent to allow him to ask questions. Any objections?

AN HON. MEMBER: Any time limit?

CHAIR: He will work with the same rotation of 10 minutes according to speakers on each section.

I should also note for everyone's benefit that I've been very generous with these opening questions. They go quickly down into details that I would have preferred that we dealt with later but that's fine; we have them on the Table.

First of all, Mr. Lane, is he able to ask questions? I look for support from my colleagues.

You can just gesture to me if you have no objection.

AN HON. MEMBER: Leave.

CHAIR: Okay. MHA Lane, you have 10 minutes, Sir.

MR. LANE: Thank you.

I probably won't be using all the time anyway. All the line by lines, traditionally -

AN HON. MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

MR. LANE: Yeah, I know, I do say that all the time. I won't be doing any line by lines anyway; I just have a couple of general questions I guess.

First of all, I just want to say for the record that I do share some of the concerns of my colleague for St. John's Centre about the timing of the report and so on. With that said, that's water under the bridge. I can say that since that time, and we have a new minister there, that he's been nothing but co-operative to me. I can honestly say that.

I'm looking to move forward, not look back, but I do share some of the concerns around the timing of that task force report and the actual plan that was put out in July or August, whatever it was. Although, I didn't think it was much of a big plan, it was just basically three scenarios: at home, hybrid or at school. Anyway, we'll move on.

I'm just wondering, Minister, something came out through the school district recently about radon in schools. That was something that had been brought to my attention, actually, a while ago. I'm just wondering where we are with that, with the concern of radon existing in a number of schools throughout the province.

I know that the school district, I believe, said they were looking at making sure that testing was done in all the schools now and that any issues would be alleviated. It's a concerning issue, radon, but it's not something that requires a huge investment to correct, to my understanding.

Any comment on that?

CHAIR: Minister?

MR. OSBORNE: Thank you.

Yes, Paul, this is something that has been ongoing with the English School District for a couple of years. It's a co-operative effort between the federal government and the English School District. They've been proactive in looking for and identifying schools that had a higher than what would be considered acceptable by Health Canada radon levels.

The federal government and the English School District have indicated there's no danger in the schools as long as the issue is remediated. The federal government has given guidelines of either two years in the cases that are above what's acceptable, but lower or less concern, or one year in the ones have a higher concern. The remediation is essentially piping in fans underneath the school to allow the escape of gas.

One of the things to keep in mind: Homes that are near these schools with higher than acceptable radon levels would perhaps have the same concerns because of the geology and so on in this province. It's essentially the breakdown of uranium in soil and water that causes radon. The English School District, because of the geology in the province, were proactive in trying to identify.

It's with a number of hours in a day and a 70-year exposure that the federal government would say causes the concern; however, the English School District has been very quick to remediate the schools that have been identified and intend to do so with the ones that are identified now.

MR. LANE: Minister, am I to understand then that the remediation is done in all the schools, or are there a number of schools that are outstanding that are not done? If there are some that are not done, is it possible to get a list of what's done and what's not, and a time frame?

MR. OSBORNE: The English School District presented a list of the schools that were identified in this round of testing.

MR. LANE: Okay.

MR. OSBORNE: So in the previous round of testing the remediation has been completed.

MR. LANE: Okay.

MR. OSBORNE: In this round of testing the results only came out a couple of weeks ago or a week ago. Within one year eight of those will be remediated and the remaining will be done within two years.

MR. LANE: All right, thank you.

On a similar vein related to COVID-19, an issue that has come up is the issue of ventilation in schools and having at least one window in a classroom that can open. I know that you have committed to ensure that all the schools had that work done. I'm just wondering can you give us some idea as to the progress on that. Has that been done in all the schools or most of the schools?

MR. OSBORNE: The English School District has been busy. There are a large number of schools now that have been looked after with a minimum of one window with screening. The schools that haven't yet, some of the screens have been ordered, some of them need to be custom made, but in every classroom that has windows at least one of those will have a screen.

MR. LANE: Okay, thank you.

Looking at the whole concept of – and I know my colleagues raised the issue about teacher ratios and additional guidance and all that stuff. I'm just wondering about children with special needs. I believe you announced there were some additional resources going into that. But in particular for a pretty extended period of time now we've heard from one – I don't mind saying the name, because they're very public. The Churchill family have really been pushing on the issue of deaf children and feeling that they're not getting the appropriate resources that are required for deaf children in schools.

Is that ongoing? Has that issue been resolved or is that still an ongoing issue? If it hasn't been resolved to the satisfaction of the parents, is there anything being actively pursued to hopefully address their concerns?

MR. GARDINER: Mr. Lane, yes, about a year and a half ago there was a working group established, comprised of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of the Deaf, the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association Newfoundland and Labrador chapter, Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority, as well as the department and the English School District. Some Janeway personnel were added as well, an audiologist.

Significant work has gone on over the past couple of years. For example, the English School District just started what they're

referring to as an ASL immersion program at East Point Elementary where there are four or five profoundly deaf children that are grouped in that school and a part of that school community. But, again, they have an opportunity to interact with each other throughout the day.

The Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority has provided professional learning to our 22 deaf and hard of hearing itinerant teachers, as well as starting to do some assessments on some of the children here in the province. It was scheduled for last year, but this year some of our deaf and hard of hearing students, particularly some of the deaf students, will participate in some of the short camps that APSEA typically would have; yet to be determined whether that would be in person or virtual, depending on the COVID.

Eldred, I don't know if you want to add any more in terms of the working – you're good?

MR. LANE: All right, thank you.

I guess my last question for now is going to be – I'm just wondering: Is there any appetite now to look at the 1.6-kilometre school busing rule, at least for K-to-6 children? This has been an ongoing issue. We keep saying we're on par with other provinces and there's no doubt we are. I acknowledge that, but it continues to be an issue.

When the former administration was over there, this administration was lobbying to change it. Then, when this administration, the other one – it keeps going back and forth. The reality of it is that it is a safety issue in a lot of areas. I know in Mount Pearl as an example, every school in Mount Pearl is surrounded by a – there's a four-lane road, if you will. Whether it be Old Placentia Road, Richard Nolan Drive, Ruth Avenue, Smallwood Drive, Commonwealth Avenue, they're all bounded by four-lane roads, lots of traffic.

Sidewalks are not always clear in the winter. Mount Pearl is great at snow clearing but can't be 100 per cent all the time. I'm just wondering, is there any movement?

MR. OSBORNE: It certainly won't be this year. We've added 145 new buses this year. I

think in terms of what we've provided, the challenges with getting those buses, with getting drivers for those buses and other implications, including parking lot congestion as a result of additional buses, it won't be this year.

MR. LANE: Okay.

CHAIR: Any further questions, Mr. Pardy, on this section? No.

Mr. Dinn? No, you're fine on this section.

Mr. Lane, any further questions here?

MR. LANE: No.

CHAIR: I'll turn to the Clerk.

CLERK: 1.1.01 to 1.2.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 1.1.01 through to 1.2.01 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

This section of the Estimates has been completed.

On motion, subheads 1.1.01 through 1.2.01 carried.

CHAIR: Now to the Clerk.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.1.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: We turn to Mr. Pardy.

MR. PARDY: Mr. Chair, I look at the clock and know that we've gone one hour on the Minister's Office. I think of all the sections that are before us and when we get to the post-secondary, which is at the very end, that would be so unfortunate if we didn't get through the budget in the time that we're allotted.

May I have permission to transcend from one section to another section without aborting my time? It seems that –

CHAIR: What I would say in defence, Sir, is that I was very generous in a lot of the questioning. If you look at the specifics of many of the line items, we actually did delve into much of that. I'm going to try to be more rigid as we go through and so on, but we'll take the time as needed.

If the Committee feels they need more time, we can arrange for additional time. Right now we are scheduled for three hours. We have a maximum that we have to be out of here, at 12:45 at the absolute latest, but we are scheduled for three hours and we'll see what the Committee feels at 12 o'clock.

MR. PARDY: Thank you, Sir.

The Administrative Support, I know we discussed last year and we talked about the operating system for controls for the monitoring of the school board expenditures and their budget. If I'm not mistaken we talked about looking at it coming under the department system of last year to streamline it. The genesis of our discussion last year was the 2018 Auditor General's report where it looked at we had fraud within the system and she uncovered that.

I think that was the strategy that we discussed last year. I'm just looking for an update. I think this is the section of which that would apply to. Are we merging those two entities into one system for the safeguards?

MR. GARDINER: Craig, I would suggest there's not a section in here that would relate to that because that would be a broader government initiative.

Yes, this time last year we were talking about attempting to bring the school district into government's shared services. A significant piece of work was done on that; however, in the end it was determined that the school district was different enough right now because it has 254 schools, 254 sites as part of it.

A school district is certainly different than a normal government operation, so the decision was made that the school district would actually be purchasing a system that was tailor-made for school districts that's used throughout the country. It's called Cayenta. That was the

preferred option for the school district in terms of moving forward with a new system for finances and inventory, et cetera.

MR. PARDY: I'm assuming it's been proven; we've done a jurisdictional scan on that. The rationale for having a different system was ...?

MR. GARDINER: Well, it's because of the uniqueness of the school system in and of itself. Many of the school districts across the country are not part of government systems. It's not a nice, neat match because of the uniqueness of the school districts.

In particular, if you look at the English School District, they need an administrative system that can really reach into 254 schools, which is a lot different than central purchasing and the typical way government works.

MR. PARDY: Okay, good. Thank you.

Looking at 2.1.01 on the Salaries, I think all the Operating Accounts are less in the actuals than what was budgeted. Instead of going through each one individually, looking at the Operating Accounts in its totality there was less spent on every section there. Again now, I default to COVID, but it can't be.

MR. GARDINER: No. I'll speak to this one, but it will come up again and again and you'll see in a second.

In this particular account, Craig, Employee Benefits, Transportation and Communications, and Property, Furnishings and Equipment: those three line items are significantly less than what was budgeted. The reason for that was last year the department went through an exercise whereby it consolidated those line items from various divisions – so Programs and Services, Student Support Services, Evaluation and Research.

It wasn't a reduction per se, but it was basically consolidating it into one spot so that we could better allot money to various divisions in a more fair and equitable way.

As you can see in the budgeted amount versus the 2021 Estimates amount, there's no change or very little change. That's because the money is

still there for next year. The issue became, we restated it, we put it in the budget line; however, when it was charged off it didn't come out of that particular budget line, it came out of budget lines back in the divisions which it shouldn't have.

You'll actually see some expenditures later on in Programs and Services, Evaluation and Research, Employee Benefits and Property, Furnishings and Equipment. We might have spent \$2,000 and you're looking saying there was no money there to begin with. Well, that's where the money came from.

MR. PARDY: Thank you.

Just as a matter of curiosity, and I know you shouldn't let curiosity enter into this, but remember last year we talked about Transportation and Communications and I think there was \$127,000 was spent on postage. I quickly default and said we use more email than what we did in the past. I thought that was large, but I realize the magnitude of our operation.

Is that figure generally the same or was that decreased somewhat? If we had a breakdown on postage cost, that might seem trivial but it would be just more ...

MS. HAYES: It has reduced somewhat but not totally significantly. It is down a little bit, given that we do use email more.

MR. PARDY: Good.

In the Grants and Subsidies, again, much less. Is it the same thing with those that they were moved to other departments?

MR. GARDINER: No.

MR. PARDY: No. These are the ones that are approved due to the minister's discretion?

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. OSBORNE: We have in that area, I think it is \$35,000. That was just over \$8,000 spent in that particular area.

MR. PARDY: Minister, the submissions that were made on this, I'm assuming that they were

granted. There were none that were turned down; it's just that you didn't get submissions into the department for those available funds.

MR. OSBORNE: Yeah, I don't imagine. I can't speak because it is at the minister's discretion. I can find out but I don't imagine somebody was turned down if they had come forward, because less than a quarter of the money was actually spent.

MR. PARDY: Okay, good.

I ask that knowing there are a lot of needs out there, whether it be playground or lack of play facilities at a certain school, then there are a lot of needs that would be there.

In the second section when we looked at the Grants and Subsidies, 2.1.02: Are the recipients the same as what they were last year? We don't need to go through them, that's not an efficient use of our time, but if they are the same we could just move on.

MR. GARDINER: Yes, they're exactly the same, Craig.

MR. PARDY: Exactly the same.

MR. GARDINER: The same every year.

MR. OSBORNE: (Inaudible) the recipients.

MR. GARDINER: The recipients? Yeah, you're talking 2.1.02, Assistance to Educational Agencies and Advisory Committees?

MR. PARDY: Correct.

MR. GARDINER: Yeah, so that would be your CMEC, CAMET, Federation of School Councils, Murphy Centre.

MR. PARDY: Yes.

MR. GARDINER: Yeah, same.

MR. PARDY: Bob, I've always used the adage that if you're doing things the same, you're off track. Every time I hear something that's the same and goes year after year after year, if it's the same amounts then I would say that there might be something we need to revisit here in

this portfolio to make sure that we have the right costing. If not, to see as to whether there are other entities out there that might be worthy of this significant amount of funds. They all are – just to be on the record, but just to know that there may be some others.

I don't know how many years we've been with the same numbers, and I can't think of anything off the top of my head. I don't think we need to spend time on that, but it's just something to know going forward to analyze that pool of money.

MR. GARDINER: So if I can just speak to that very quickly, Craig.

In many cases, for example, if it's the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada or the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, those types of organizations, their budgets, from a provincial and territorial perspective, haven't increased probably in seven or eight years, although they would like to see an increase.

MR. PARDY: Yes.

MR. GARDINER: But their lines of business certainly have changed and it's a continuous.

Now, that said, Murphy Centre, for example, is funded from here, and the Murphy Centre amount has increased over the past three or four years.

MR. PARDY: Good. Thank you.

In my concluding time, my colleague mentioned radon. I would say the entry into looking into radon in our schools is a good thing. I celebrate that and wherever the origin was – and I know that my hon. colleague said that we don't look back and we ought not to, but I know that we were the last province to do so. I know that in legislation we find ourselves that we're often the last ones. We have to look at jurisdiction to find it happened in every other province. But on this one, I only wish that the previous three governments jumped into it.

The only thing, just for the record to know, that I'm glad it's happening. Any time we look at anything that jeopardizes the safety of our students and staff, it's a good thing.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you.

MHA Jim Dinn.

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just to start with, you addressed the operating accounts and basically what I'm understanding is it's a consolidation, the amounts here. With regard to Salaries, in this the discrepancy, I think, is \$181,000. Would that be the same then? In the actual, it dropped by about \$181,000.

MR. GARDINER: No, Salaries would be different than that, Jim. The consolidation happened in Employee Benefits, Transportation and Communities and Property, Furnishings and Equipment.

MR. J. DINN: Okay. That would be the same rationale as such, would it?

MR. GARDINER: No, no. Salaries, the difference there was because the front desk position was vacant for the entire year and that's one of the positions that we are offering up in terms of the attrition management.

It just speaks to some vacancies. We could have a vacancy for a month, a couple of months so, obviously, that's budget savings. There were four vacant positions: an organizational budget analyst, departmental program coordinator, financial analyst and information management analyst for various periods of time.

MR. J. DINN: Okay. The reason why it's pretty well back up to what it was, you're looking at filing those and probably slightly up –?

MR. GARDINER: Absolutely, yes.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, fair enough. That sounds fair enough.

Again with Purchased and Professional Services, there's still not a minimal (inaudible) but I guess you're looking at the Purchase Services and Professional Services will remain pretty much the same as what they were last year.

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. J. DINN: Okay.

In the Estimates from last year, there was a section 2.1.03. I know it's not there this year. It was entitled Policy and Information Management. There was spending of nearly \$1 million associated with it. Have these expenses been relocated to this section? I'm just looking at what happened to it.

MR. GARDINER: Yes, Jim, the short answer is yes. If you look at the heading 2.1.01, it's Administrative Support, Policy and Information Management.

MR. J. DINN: Okay.

MR. GARDINER: It's all rolled into one.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, thank you very much.

With regard to the Assistance to Educational Agencies and Advisory Committees, I don't need a listing right now but would it be possible to get a breakdown as to what they're used for or which organizations receive what?

MR. GARDINER: Mr. Parady requested a copy of the binder beforehand so that will be in it.

MR. J. DINN: Perfect, excellent.

We'll get a copy of that too?

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. J. DINN: Thank you.

With regard to the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils and to the point that my colleague from Bonavista raised that we've been doing the same. I know that there was a slight increase by about \$5,000, I think, to their budget. That's something that the minister and the NDP caucus – we talked about in a previous lifetime.

Is there an intent here to lease with them, since they provide such an integral role, to look at bringing in the grants, the assistance that they receive back up to, I think what it was, it was around \$50,000 at one time per annum? By the way, Minister, not necessarily all in the one

year, but I'm talking about a plan to eventually get them back up.

MR. OSBORNE: Yeah, I've had some discussion with them. I'm certainly willing to entertain gradual increases over time.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, appreciate that.

I think, Chair, that's all the specific questions I might have related to that section that I can see. I have questions for later on but I'll come back to them.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Parady, any further questions on this particular section?

MR. PARDY: Just a list of the Grants and Subsidies in 2.1.01. Bob, would that be in the binder as well? The ones from the minister? That would be in the binder?

MR. GARDINER: Say ...?

MR. PARDY: I said you mentioned that the Grants and Subsidies under 2.1.02 will be in the binder that we'll see.

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. PARDY: I'm just wondering about the Grants and Subsidies in section 2.1.01. Would that be in the binder?

MR. GARDINER: Those are not in the binder, but we can certainly get you a copy of those.

MR. PARDY: Fantastic.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay, you're good.

Mr. Lane, any questions on this section?

MR. LANE: A very quick one.

First of all, anything that you're providing to the two parties, I would like to have a copy of as well, in terms of the binder and all of that information.

I have one general question and that's one that I've asked in all the Estimates and I'll keep asking it. I'm just wondering, in terms of COVID-19, there has been – obviously, I think we've realized we can do things differently. There's been some savings, I would suspect, in terms of utilizing Zoom for meetings instead of travel. I can see where that could be beneficial as well in the school districts, as well as with the department and utilizing technology. Maybe people working from home, some savings that could possibly be accrued there if we don't need as much office space.

The bottom line is, I guess, are you planning on looking at how we've done things differently within the department and making it a permanent thing, where it makes sense, in the future?

MR. OSBORNE: The short answer to that is absolutely.

MR. LANE: That's all the questions I have.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

I'll turn to the Clerk, then. We will enter in this section of the Estimates.

CLERK: 2.1.01 to 2.1.02 inclusive.

CHAIR: Shall 2.1.01 through to 2.1.02 carry?

All those in favour, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

This section of the Estimates is carried.

On motion, subheads 2.1.01 through 2.1.02 carried.

CHAIR: Let's go into our next section.

CLERK: 3.1.01 to 3.6.01 inclusive.

CHAIR: Nice jump there. Okay, thank you.

3.1.01 through to 3.6.01.

Mr. Pardy, you are up, Sir.

MR. PARDY: Moving right along.

3.1.01: There's an increase of roughly \$7 million over what was spent last year. That's in the Regular Teachers section there. I'm just asking what that would account. I'm trying to read your mind, Bob. That's a dangerous thing.

MR. GARDINER: All good.

Essentially, Craig, when you look at this particular budget line, this includes what we have listed there as regular teachers. Then everything underneath that, of course, is tied to regular teachers, as you can see: substitute teachers for leave – that would be sick leave, family leave, et cetera – substitute teachers for professional development leave and Employee Benefits. As the number of teachers change then, obviously, those budget lines have to change accordingly.

Really, what this summarizes here is there was a reduction in the regular teachers' salary because of declining enrolment. Then, of course, this year we added on an extra 100 teaching and learning assistants, an extra 50 reading specialists and an extra 13 learning resource teachers. So there's a slight decrease for declining enrolment; then there's an increase for those extra resources in terms of the Education Action Plan.

MR. PARDY: Bob, I think the decline at last year's Estimates, you had mentioned 46 or 49 teachers previously were lost as a result of declining enrolment with 1,000. I assume it is 700 now, students, that would be – what number would we be looking at?

MR. GARDINER: You're right, 49 last year. This year it will be 33.5.

MR. PARDY: 33.5. Okay.

Was there any change in the number of teachers that were seconded, do you think, from year to year?

MR. GARDINER: Not this year.

MR. PARDY: Negligible?

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. PARDY: No difference in that.

If we can go to the School Board Operations, probably just a general comment on that, Bob – and I'll probably just throw a question out – or the minister. My last year in the system was 2013 when I retired as an administrator at that time. That rings a bell because we had the consolidation of boards at that time; remember we were going from four down to one?

The rationale at that time, when I was in the system, was that there was the thought – and we all agreed – in the system that when we did that we would get more resources in our classrooms because we were streamlining the school board operations so that we would make sure that the classrooms were looked after primarily. There was tremendous support for that. I echoed it and applauded it as an administrator when we know that we struggled each year with sometimes those large class sizes in metro. Contrary to the 11.6 or in that range of 12.5, but in those metro large schools we faced large enrolments.

Take the totality of rural and urban, then I would think that, yes, we have a number that we're faced with, but in all practicality at Clarendville Middle School and at the schools that Mr. Dinn references quite often, busting at the seams. I thought it was a good idea. But before coming here to Estimates today, I looked at the budget lines since 2012 to current to find out about the School Board Operations. We dipped one year and if my memory serves me correctly, it may have been that year or the year that was after where it dipped slightly. Since then, we've been increasing.

I would say to you it didn't work out like we had anticipated and what we thought in 2013, that we were applauding because it didn't happen. If I look at the numbers, I think it is 200-and-something employees in the Department of Education. The number that was online was 371 in the school district and I know that's all inclusive, Bob, when we look at that figure. If you add those two numbers together and look at our administrative content that looks after supporting our schools, at a time where you're constantly hearing schools out there saying we can't manage, we have 35 in a classroom – and I

can say that in the later part of my career that is what we were faced with, high numbers.

I would look at the entity and the administration and the operationalizing of our schools like we look at the Grants and Subsidies. If that's remaining the same and we have all those personnel looking after the operationalizing of schools, and we still, in our system, have those schools that are busting at the seams with large classes, it's probably something that we should look at going forward.

The concept of the school board to support the schools – and many of these schools are stressed, there's something that doesn't fit very well in that aspect. I've always contended and long contended, without data or without evidence – but I would love to be in a conversation sometimes where you look at if those entities were merged; we look at a school board and the Department of Education would become one streamlined and would operationalize and look after the schools.

My colleague, Mr. Dinn, had mentioned earlier about the task force report. I concur with that. It didn't seem correct, even though I know that everyone's intent was on board and I think they were focused on the school year. There are no stones to throw, but if we look at the optics that's outside there, when government would come out and say, well, that is the school board report. It's not the school board report, because a school board operates under government, it is always a government report.

There was nothing in the school system – if I was the administrator, the principal of Clarendville Middle School, I was accountable for everything that happened in the school. The minister would be accountable for everything that would happen within that whole fraternity. So the only thing – without getting too carried away, but you can tell that I have a passion with that – is to look at a system where you would streamline the operations personnel wise, and you turn it right around and you start at the classroom level, on the bottom of the school system, to make sure that your personnel are placed.

Many of the things we respond to here now are based because we have such stress in our

system; we have such stress in many parts of our system. If you look at what we've added in the third year – and I think the minister had stated he added 200 teacher learning assistants, 104 reading specialists, 39 reading resource teachers and they are all good. They're good additions to a system, but keep in mind that we still have classes of 35 that are out there in the system and we add things to a system that is stressed.

The only thing I would contend is that when we look at this management entity, we streamline that entity to put the resources to make sure where they're needed the most within the school system. How that works and operationalize, you've got the data; you've got the system. Politics ought not to stop that. When I say politics, we don't need a buffer or a fall guy or someone in the middle to say, listen, it's them who are responsible; it's their call. It is more efficient for us as a province to say stand by what happens, because ultimately it's the minister's responsibility, whatever happens, ultimately.

I digress, but anyway, at least you know exactly how the man feels about everything. At least I can share with you that I certainly think that we may – may – and Bob may take exception to that – but I think we may be top-heavy and I know that each single entity is not top-heavy, but if you merge them together there may be resources and dollars that, all of a sudden, we can move to alleviate the stresses in the system. Instead of adding to the periphery, let's make those class sizes more reasonable.

If I had a class that was 1-15, you can move the world; 1-20, what you couldn't achieve and a lot of the things that we add on to counter the stress will not be necessary, because with that ratio you've got a far greater working ratio.

CHAIR: Your time is expired, Mr. Pardy.

Mr. Dinn.

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

I wasn't going to launch into a speech, but I really have to pick up on what my colleague has said and I'll echo what Mr. Pardy has said.

I had classes where I had 15 that was basically basic English. I could be more exhausted at the end of that class than I could going in to a class of 30 academic English in high school that I had after. It's the nature of the student, the nature of the child and the needs deficit that's there.

I think that's one of the things we expected, certainly, when the boards were amalgamated is that somehow the resources would end up in the classroom. Really, in the end, I share the fact that it seems to have gotten top heavy and on the ground in the schools, it has not changed significantly.

I've seen full-day kindergarten, play-based learning work remarkably well in a school in Central where I watched the teacher being able to observe when a child picked up on something or accomplished an outcome where she could – perfect, look at that. I watched it happen. In the metro area, in St. John's, where you have much larger classes, that's significantly more challenging to do. Throw into that – and I go back to the 15 students that I had – the needs of the children in that class.

I've already had some teachers approach me who were attacked by a student recently. Whether their resources were there or not, I don't know, but the fact is that when we're looking at the numbers in the classroom, it has to be more than just simply the student-teacher ratio; it has to be also factored into the needs of the children in that classroom. That's one of the things that, when I was president, we tried to look at. When you're looking at a class size, you have to factor in the number of children that have special needs, but there is even more to it than that, the frustrating part about this with the school board operations and trying to get the necessary teaching services in mine.

What we would resort to get class sizes down to a reasonable size or to get the extra help – I can tell you because I was involved in it, certainly in counselling teachers as a president and as a teacher myself – it came down to let's start using the fire regulations of the 20 square feet and the 30 inches of egress between desks. That's basically how I and other teachers were able to get the class sizes down to below the cap, because they exceeded even the fire regulations. They were not even within fire code.

Basically, in the one school where they had been seeking intervention, seeking the extra resources for a child who was violent – and by the way, most of the times I would hear of violence in the classroom was not at the high school; it's usually at the elementary and primary. That's where it occurred. In this one particular school, despite the best efforts of the administration and the school, they could not get the extra unit until, of course, the teacher was struck and threatened to use the right to refuse work. I threatened to go public with it.

It should never have to come to that, but there is a problem in the system when a principal is sitting at his desk in a school adjacent to a busy street, keeping an eye out because one of the students is a runner, as we would call them. A child who might very well run out into the middle of the street in harms way. So I think in many ways what I've fought for and what I'll continue to fight for is the resources in the schools so that teachers and staff can do their jobs because those working conditions, those teaching conditions are the learning conditions of the students.

I think in many ways there's a certain benefit to amalgamation, to bringing boards together, but I think bringing in one large school board to try and govern this province, to manage it, I think it's just as well to get rid of it altogether and have the Department of Education manage it, if that's the case. Or, I think, it would be more appropriate even to look at dividing them up into smaller sections so they could respond more appropriately to the areas.

I don't know if we saved any money in the school board operations with that and I don't know if the resources have necessarily gone into the classroom. Certainly from the teachers who called me this week with large class sizes and multiple needs, that's not the case.

So, with that in mind, let's just take a look at a few questions there. With regard to Allowances and Assistance, just with regard to what is that budget line for, the 09, I think, under 3.1.01?

MR. GARDINER: Jim, that budget line is actually for bursaries for students. I'll use Mud Lake as an example: when they hit high school

there, then they move to another community and pays for a bursary for those students.

MR. J. DINN: It looks like we paid out most of that, so that's pretty good then. A pretty good uptake.

MR. GARDINER: Oh, I'm sorry, Jim, I misspoke. My apologies, I was looking at the wrong one.

That's actually – no, the Allowances and Assistance, \$30,000 and we only paid \$12,500.

MR. J. DINN: No, I was looking under 3.1.01, \$40,000 and we paid out \$37,500.

MR. GARDINER: Oh, I'm sorry.

So that's the math bursaries for teachers.

MR. J. DINN: Oh, excellent. So there's good take up on that.

How many teachers benefited from that?

MR. GARDINER: I don't have the exact number, but I know the number of – and, again, it varies from fiscal year to fiscal year. We have had over 100 applications and, again, the money is paid out depending on when they do the course, but there's significant uptake from the K-to-6 teachers.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, excellent.

Lucky; if I was there I would probably be up taking on it myself, but that's another matter.

Okay, with regard to Regular Teachers, and, again, I think you mentioned that there was an increase in the budget of a little over \$3.5 million and that's simply the addition of teachers with regard to the Education Action Plan.

MR. GARDINER: Factored into that then would be the reduction for declining enrolment, as well; some in, some out.

MR. J. DINN: But still you're looking at an increase this year.

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. J. DINN: Okay.

Substitute Teachers, I notice that there's no change. With the extra teachers, the teachers who were hired under the – I'll call it the COVID leave or the COVID substitute teachers, the ones who are on contract, that's factored into that or not?

MR. GARDINER: That would not be factored – well –

MR. J. DINN: Or would that be factored into the Regular Teachers salary?

MR. GARDINER: Right now, they would be factored into the Substitute Teachers - Leave because we would be using those teachers as substitutes anyway, typically that would be the plan. The only difference is now they're assigned to a school so they're not going to be called in every morning. The extra \$1.1 million from the feds is to offset the difference in the Substitute Teachers pay versus the Regular Teachers pay.

MR. J. DINN: Perfect, okay.

I'll ask this question here with regard to the substitute teachers who are in the school system right now. I'm in a school where there's a substitute teacher who is hired on and let's say I'm a French teacher or I'm a physics teacher where, obviously, you're going to need a certain skill set. Let's say that I'm out or let's say the French teacher is out, and the substitute teacher doesn't have French or is not a physics teacher, is an English teacher like me.

What happens in that – and let's say this teacher is out for two or three days for whatever reason – that substitute teacher who is there, is that the first person to cover that teacher that's out, regardless of whether he or she has the qualifications or not? Is there an allowance for the specialist teacher or whatever to call in a substitute who has the qualifications? I'm just trying to figure out how that would work now.

MR. GARDINER: Typically, the substitute teacher who is placed in the school will be the first person that they would go to; however, obviously, if the substitute teacher is not qualified, which typically wouldn't happen in a

K to 6, unless it's a French immersion piece. The way these were placed in schools was based on the number or the average number of substitute teacher days used per school.

Typically, for example, and I don't have the number in front of me, Jim, but if there was an average of, I'll say, three substitute teachers per day in a particular school, that school may have one of the term contracts. You would expect there would likely be one, two or three substitute teachers in that school for the day. A teacher for French immersion would be called in because the other teacher would likely be used somewhere else anyway. The qualifications, obviously, would need to be made.

MR. J. DINN: My time is up but I'll start that up the next time I'm up.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Dinn.

We will pause now as promised and take a 15-minute recess. So be back here at 10:51.

Recess

CHAIR: Thanks, everyone, for coming back.

Mr. Parady, back to you, Sir.

MR. PARDY: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Last year in Estimates we talked about when the final year of the Action Plan was done we would revisit the teacher allocation model. That was the previous minister had stated that.

Are we still on for that review? I'm assuming this is the third year, isn't it, of the implementation? The last year? Now that we have all the resources deployed, are we hoping still for a review of the teacher allocation?

MR. OSBORNE: Work is progressing towards that, yeah.

MR. PARDY: Okay, that's a definite maybe on the record.

One thing I would say to you, we didn't have the data last year but we asked for the teacher sick leave, what it would cost for the teacher sick leave to support teachers that would be off work.

That was provided last year, but if you look at the figures from 2014-15 to current – I think the current at that time, what you supplied last year was '18-'19, and '18-'19 were a little over \$18 million to support teachers who are off work due to illness. That was a 20 per cent increase from '15-'16 to that.

Twenty per cent is significant. Probably the math on that would be – you're looking at over \$2 million. I would say we had two increases in class size allowances: 2016 and again in 2018. I'd like to ask: Do you entertain the possibility that increase in sick leave may correlate with the increase in class size? That's probably a hypothetical question, but can you see a potential correlation between those two instances?

MR. OSBORNE: I wasn't at last year's Estimates, obviously, but you said it was over \$18 million. Just over \$17 million is the average this year, so there's been a bit of a drop. I'm not sure you could actually draw that correlation, but I mean it's something we can look at.

MR. PARDY: Yeah and that wouldn't be COVID-related, that figure – would it not – not out two, three weeks. Not really. No, that's good.

The NLESD task force report on May 27 stated – and I read because it caught my eye. On page 26 of that report it stated: "The budget for student assistant salaries has seen pressure over the past several years. If additional student assistant hours are required to maintain the existing level of care, funding must be requested from EECD."

What would they mean by pressure? Would that mean inability to supply due to financing? I know now we're back to the level where we could say that could be a school board issue, but remember they're asking the department for more funds if there's an increased demand.

MR. GARDINER: In terms of what they mean by increased pressure, they'd have to speak to that. That said, there is an increase, as you can see in the Estimates document, of \$600,000 this current school year. As well, there was an increase of \$1.3 million for student assistants as a result of federal funding. So \$600,000 is an

increase from last year and then another \$1.3 million for student assistants this year from the federal funding.

MR. PARDY: Okay.

MR. GARDINER: Sorry, Craig, \$1.6 million federal funding. So \$600,000 provincial funding and \$1.6 million federal funding.

MR. PARDY: Thank you.

One thing I did mention last year, as an administrator – and I throw this out again just going forward, knowing that we're looking at our expenditures – school bus transportation. You know the particulars, I don't. I was just on the receiving end.

I know we had schools that would lose 14 days, at least, with buses running. In our school, we had 14 that served our school. If we lost 12 days or 10 days due to inclement weather, then those buses were paid for by the taxpayers of Newfoundland and Labrador.

I don't throw it out for a question, I just state that going forward when we look at the efficiencies we have, if we're going to say that it's tough to put out a contract knowing that you may lose so many days and you won't be paid for that time, I understand that. But we probably need to make sure that those days that are lost enable the schools to be able to use those buses in a much clearer and precise manner.

Say Clarendville Middle School misses one day; one day might equate to 250 kilometres. It's quite conceivable they have enough on that one day to be able to support a student trip under a normal year to St. John's or to some event and to come back. It does save the money of taxpayers because they've already paid for that bus that would run.

I know that contracts come up but at least when you sit down to do a negotiation going forward, have that a little cleaner to know that the students and the parents who send their children to school are getting their bang for their buck on those occasions.

If I may proceed to 3.1.04, School Supplies: Approximately a \$400,000 decrease over what was spent last year in Supplies.

MR. GARDINER: Yeah, that's \$350,000, Craig, that was put in the budget last year for a purchase of social-emotional learning resources which is a one-time purchase.

MR. PARDY: Good, Bob.

The Revenue, where would the Revenue be derived from?

MR. GARDINER: Primarily, that Revenue would be the sale of textbooks down to LRDC. If someone is looking for – right now, they're provided free to all students in the K-to-12 system but if it's a private school looking for some books or something to that effect that they'd purchase.

MR. PARDY: Good, thank you.

If I could move to 3.2.01, Curriculum Development. In the Estimates last year, we talked about digitizing curriculum plans. I don't know if Eldred mentioned that or not – you probably didn't.

Somebody mentioned about the digitizing because I think the conversation we had last year I might have referenced that we had intermediate health curriculum that we currently have, I mentioned that one. That was published in the late 90s. It talked about the year 2000 rolling in and what can you expect. It was group activities related to it, but that textbook is still a resource that we would have in our school system for intermediate health.

We also had the understanding last year that if you spend four or five years developing curriculum, by the time you roll it out, it's already a little dated. The only thing I would say is that the way to do it would be digitization of the curriculum guide. I think it might have been mentioned last year that Alberta was looking at that and we were – I trust your memory Eldred that you didn't –

MR. GARDINER: Yes, Craig, last year, we did reference a project that Alberta were undertaking in terms of curriculum development

and an electronic system. Unfortunately, Alberta, shortly after Estimates last year, actually put a stop to that particular program. They kind of halted it.

That said, we're still moving forward and looking at the opportunities for digitizing resources in particular. As you can appreciate, one of the stumbling blocks, really, was resources in the hands of students and teachers alike. Of course, digital learning is a big initiative, obviously, that we would like to undertake and probably would've over the next five to 10 years.

Again, an opportunity as a result of COVID, now that every teacher will have their own laptop and every student Grade 7 to 12 will have their own Chromebook, the opportunity for digital learning, obviously, is significantly enhanced.

Now, in terms of textbooks and resources, we can automatically assume that every student, 7 to 12 in particular, will have readily access to those type of materials when we move in that direction. We've just moved it forward that much quicker.

MR. PARDY: Good.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you, Mr. Gardiner.

It's over to Mr. Dinn, please, to continue the questioning.

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Just to pick up with the Chromebooks for students, and I ask this from a very practical point of view of how it's going to work; I think of the usual process of getting books back in at the end of the year that we would go through. Will they be assigned a bar code? Will they be required to turn them in at the end of the year? If they don't, what's the process then of getting them back?

MR. GARDINER: Jim, yes, they'll all have a bar code and be inventoried appropriately, from an asset management perspective. The school district has been developing and actually has a draft of an end-user policy, whereby the student and the parent will have to sign off. I'm not

quite sure if they have to pass them back in. If they're a returning student, will they have to pass them back in in June and pick them up again in September: I don't know the answer to that.

MR. J. DINN: No, and I ask that even from the point of view of just the workload or the expectations on those in the school. I'm sure you're aware that even – and certainly Mr. Pardy would be – maybe not at the primary and elementary level and that, but I can tell you at the high school, that's a huge undertaking just to keep track of them. It can affect whether a school gets a budget or not, the number of books that are replaced. Something to look into. I appreciate the fact that if the student is returning, then that would be within their possession then for the following year.

Is there a plan at the end of this, realistically, that let's say a student picks up this in Grade 10, in high school, at the end of Grade 12, would they – look, you can keep this now at this point in time. It's probably at the end of its life anyway, in many ways. Have you turned your attention towards any of those questions yet, do you think?

MR. GARDINER: That's certainly something that we haven't considered yet, getting five or six years out of a Chromebook. I guess we'll have that discussion as that time comes.

MR. J. DINN: Okay and I'm just even thinking here how technology – it's easy enough for, I think, OCIO to shut down, to block access to a computer; if it's not returned that it couldn't be used if, indeed, that's the plan. However, after three or four years I have no problem if it somehow becomes – through some arrangement that the owner of it becomes the student himself or herself.

I guess the other thing is replacement. How is that going to proceed after this as they get beat up and whatever else. Those are the things I'm hoping, as we move forward, how we can deal with that.

3.1.01, Teaching Services: I noticed there that under Substitute Teachers - Professional Development approximately \$1.1 million was not used or not invested in teachers in 2019-

2020. If you look there they actually spent \$1.27 million less than what was budgeted for. Would that be related to the fact that the school year was, sort of, brought to a bit of a halt last year or are there other reasons?

MR. GARDINER: That would be a combination of things. Partly, it would be that. Typically we'd have, for example, some meetings scheduled towards the end of the fiscal year. Keep in mind now it would have been only the last two or three weeks of the fiscal year where the schools were closed. Uptake on educational leave was a little bit reduced last year as well.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, perfect.

The next question on this would be the sources of revenue that are listed there. In the 2019-2020 budget, I'm looking at \$100,000 of revenue. It jumped significantly, over half; it doubled again. I'm just wondering what the reason was for that. Why did they double?

MR. GARDINER: The short answer there, Jim, is this count is highly variable. Revenues recovered from – oftentimes it's payroll overpayments, teacher salary overpayments, and miscellaneous unit expenses repaid by school districts and buildings from previous school years. Of course, that varies from year to year. Basically, as things happen, we have to recoup some of the overpayments. That's basically where that revenue comes from.

MR. J. DINN: Okay.

The surplus then, that would have gone where after that? Would that have been reinvested? That was just paying back.

MR. GARDINER: Gone into general revenue.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, in general revenue. Perfect.

Okay, a few specific questions then with School Board Operations. I think you've answered this one. Allowances and Assistance: That had to do with students who receive bursaries?

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. J. DINN: I see only \$12,000 of that was used. That's just simply a variable of –

MR. GARDINER: Yeah, it's a demand program.

MR. J. DINN: There was a source of revenue that was for \$650,000 that was received last year. Why is no revenue expected in this year? That's in the Revenue - Provincial line under 3.1.02.

MR. GARDINER: That follows up on one of the questions Mr. Pardy asked about the decrease in \$350,000 from the School Supplies for the social and emotional learning. That revenue there, \$350,000 of that was used for the social and emotional learning. The other \$300,000 actually was used for student assistant money.

MR. J. DINN: Okay. I'm going to go back with some specific questions, if I may, Chair, with regard to 3.1.01 under Teaching Services, regular increases. We talked a little bit about the increase there of over \$3.5 million. I'm just making sure: Would TLAs be included in that budget? In Regular Teachers, that increase?

MR. GARDINER: They are now. Initially, they weren't in Teaching Services because we weren't sure where they were going to fall, but they are there now.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, perfect.

With regard to Substitute Teacher - Leave, certainly, any teacher who presents with symptoms – or I know some teachers where their children at home now might have to be tested for it. Considering the fact that a lot of younger teachers have very limited sick leave compared to those who are teaching prior to 2006, I'm just wondering here is there any intent – if a teacher has to take time off to get tested.

It's not sick leave but they now meet that requirement where they must stay home; they do that checklist and you must stay home. Is there a special leave then for a teacher or staff in a school for that situation that would not come out of their sick leave as such?

CHAIR: The minister.

MR. OSBORNE: Jim, I think that will probably be answered out of the grievance. Once the grievance that the NLTA has put forward is resolved, those questions will be answered.

MR. J. DINN: Okay.

To that point, Minister, it's a source of concern for a lot of young teachers, especially teachers with families and teachers who are also looking after, not only young children but, sometimes, after aging parents, aging family members, that sandwich generation. Is there any attempt to look at rapid testing – I know there has been rapid testing that's been approved by Health Canada that would cut down on the amount of time that teachers, staff and even students, for that matter, would have to wait to self-isolate or to even wait for a test – to look at employing them in the school system, to make that a priority?

MR. OSBORNE: That's something that we'd rely on the advice of the chief medical officer of health. Up to this point she had indicated there was little value in that. I know the federal government has just approved a different testing model which may allow for more rapid testing. Once we get the green light from the chief medical officer of health that there is value, we'll look at that for sure.

MR. J. DINN: Okay.

I'll suggest that would go a long way to certainly easing anxiety and probably allow teachers and staff to return to work more quickly. Otherwise, it's going to become a problem if they run out of that sick leave and now they're down to a choice of taking a hit financially or to stay home.

That's about it for this section. I'll come back to it when –

CHAIR: Thank you, Mr. Dinn.

Mr. Pardy, for 10 minutes, please. I'll go to you and then we'll come back to Mr. Lane.

MR. PARDY: Okay.

3.1.01 – if you've answered it, forgive me. The Employee Benefits, you're talking about a

significant amount that was actual. If you've already said it, forgive me.

CHAIR: Bob Gardiner.

MR. GARDINER: No, Craig, I haven't answered that question yet. That's basically the early severance payout for teachers as a result of the collective agreement.

MR. PARDY: Good.

My understanding – and you may not be able to answer this because it is a school board question – was that the last elections for the school board trustees cost the taxpayers a little over half a million dollars, but it only tapped into significantly less than 3 per cent of the population in Newfoundland and Labrador. I would hope that, without an answer, if that is the case, then we come up with something a little different than that process, even though I know the merits of having people directly selecting the members. But with that low percentage then you just can't run that again if that is the outcome. I don't speak with accuracy. The only thing I know is if that is the case it's worthy of investigation to find out as to what would happen.

The other thing was I represent 14 schools in Zone 11, not 14 because 10 serve the District of Bonavista, but there are 14 in Zone 11. When I first entered the House last year I was requesting for a representative on the board to be appointed. Keep in mind when we did the Estimates last year to now, there is still nobody sitting in that position. I don't say that we wanted an election; we just need someone appointed to represent the schools that would be in the region.

Just for the record, and no question necessary there, if –

MR. OSBORNE: There have been two appointments recently, Craig.

MR. PARDY: In the two vacancies?

MR. OSBORNE: Yeah.

MR. PARDY: Okay, good. That's good.

Back into Curriculum Development. I had someone express their dismay to me and the way it went was that this educator had thought that there was an erosion in Newfoundland history, Canadian history; World War I, World War II not covered. The Newfoundland Studies, I would assume, covers those. They exist but only serve small numbers.

I know the logistics of the high school programming and people with course loads and all that, but would that be correct that those areas aren't covered or is it just a matter of the breadth of which they are covered? I'm assuming they are still within the curriculum.

MR. GARDINER: They certainly would be, yes.

MR. PARDY: They certainly are?

MR. GARDINER: Absolutely.

MR. PARDY: Fantastic. But the breadth may not be the same or the extent, conceivably.

MR. GARDINER: Again, it would depend on the course that you did. Because there used to be geography and history, now it's just a combined social studies course. It would depend on which courses you actually did, but it's still certainly covered throughout the high school curriculum.

MR. PARDY: Bob, World War I and World War II would certainly be there.

MR. GARDINER: Absolutely.

MR. PARDY: Absolutely, good stuff.

In 3.2.02 in the Language Programs, Grants and Subsidies: More was spent last year than was budgeted, a significant amount.

MR. GARDINER: Craig, that would be additional expenses related to the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Agreement on Minority-Language Education and Second Official-Language Instruction. Oftentimes what happens there is the flow of money from the federal government, so when we get it and when it's expended, there are some fluctuations.

MR. PARDY: We're talking about the curriculum, Curriculum Development, in Operating Accounts, \$50,000 less spent compared to what was budgeted. We talked about the importance of Curriculum Development; I just wanted to throw out the \$50,000 and why that would occur, and that would be ...?

MR. GARDINER: Again, that's part of the restatement part. If you look at \$271,700 for Transportation and Communication, just for argument's sake, and we only spent \$175,000, this is one of the budget lines where the communications part of that budget would have been moved over to the earlier part of the book. The expenditures certainly are reduced – are here, but they're not reflected there.

MR. PARDY: Okay.

If I may move to 3.3.01, Student Support Services. I'm assuming this is year three of the new special education policy. If it is year three, I'm assuming it would be fully implemented this current year. Or was it last year?

MR. GARDINER: No, this would be year three, so phase three. This year it would be implemented in all K-to-6 schools and then it would, over the next year or so, move into 7 to 12. But the target audience initially for the Responsive Teaching and Learning Policy would have been K to 6, in terms of the implementation of the Education Action Plan.

MR. PARDY: Would we find a program specialist now listed under Student Support Services or would they be under another heading, the responsive teaching or ...? If we looked in Student Support Services now and find that there's no student program specialist, would that be accurate?

MR. GARDINER: No, the program specialist budget line for Student Support Services would be in the Teaching Services, so it wouldn't necessarily be here.

MR. PARDY: Okay.

But we do have program specialists in the department?

MR. GARDINER: Absolutely.

MR. PARDY: Is it two, Bob?

MR. GARDINER: Oh, jeez, no, there's –

MR. PARDY: Two permanent with others seconded, maybe? Conceivably?

MR. GARDINER: Anyone know?

There is at least seven or eight, Craig.

MR. PARDY: No, that's good. No need to need to find that.

MR. GARDINER: It's a separate division within Programs and Services. There are probably eight or 10.

MR. PARDY: Okay, good stuff.

MR. GARDINER: Craig, just for clarity, in terms of where they show up, oftentimes a seconded teacher, while they may not show up in the human resource data because they're charged to Teaching Services, they are still permanent and full-time employees.

We may actually have eight or 10 on the books, but if you look at HR data, it might only show two. It's because they are paid from Teaching Services.

MR. PARDY: Okay. That's where I probably saw it, in the HR.

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. PARDY: That's why it stood out. The two seemed mighty thin.

MR. GARDINER: Right. For example, in Curriculum Development, I think if you look at HR there might be four or five and there are probably 17 or 18.

MR. PARDY: So, Bob, because they're in Teaching Services, they would be in that ratio for Stats Canada?

MR. GARDINER: Not the one I used this morning.

MR. PARDY: Oh, you're good.

3.3.02, APSEA?

MR. GARDINER: Yes.

MR. PARDY: How many hearing impaired avail of this service? Are there any? I know that in our school we had visually impaired that availed of the service and they provided a great service for them. But in the hearing impaired?

MR. GARDINER: That's a really good question, Craig. Up until recently, I would say within the last 12 months, the province really didn't avail of much services from APSEA with respect to deaf and hard of hearing. That's been historical for a number of different reasons. That said, that's reflected in the amount of money we pay APSEA. Unlike the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, where it's an equal partnership – I'll use that word – and it's a per capita revenue, APSEA is based on the services that are provided.

Again, we've made significant strides, as I mentioned before, over the past 18 months in engaging APSEA in providing some services to our province. They've done professional learning with the DHH itinerants. They actually started some assessments with students now in the province. Some of our students will actually take advantage of some of the short camps that APSEA actually provides.

MR. PARDY: You mentioned last year in the Estimates that you were going to meet with the director, I think, of APSEA – was coming down, I think you along with the school districts – the goal of having better utilization.

MR. GARDINER: That has happened and APSEA is represented on the deaf and hard of hearing working group, as well.

MR. PARDY: Good stuff.

CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dinn.

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Chair.

Going back to 3.1.02, with regard to the student assistant hours under the Grants and Subsidies, I'm just wondering how many additional student assistant hours is targeted with the money. What are we looking at here? The total number of student assistants, I think it is budgeted \$24 million.

MR. GARDINER: Jim, the total budget, as you can see, is \$24,136,600. I don't have the total number of hours off the top of my head, but if you want to do some quick math, I think the hourly rate is – and, again, it depends on what level people are at, but it's probably \$28, \$29, \$30 an hour, so you can figure out the number of hours from that. It's variable; it depends on the salary.

MR. J. DINN: Is it possible to get those numbers? If you had them off the top of your head, I'd be very impressed; but if you can get those it would be great.

With the School Board Operations, I just want to take a quick diversion here into the independent schools in relation to COVID-19 measures. Has there been any conversation with the two independent schools, at least within the city or throughout the province as well, with regard to the needs that they have in relation to COVID-19 and the measures and the resources that they need?

MR. GARDINER: No, those would be private schools that we would not be funding.

MR. J. DINN: Okay. I ask that from a question – because I did meet them and I have one in my district. One of the things they said, at least when it comes to – since we're all in this together, COVID-19, the whole notion of at least trying to make sure they have access to the cleaning supplies; maybe, if we buy it in quantity, that they would be able to access it that way. Because if that school is safe, we're all safe as well, they're all contributing, so an idea.

The francophone school: I notice in the budget I think it was \$2.5 million allocated to develop the site of a new francophone school. I know there was some push that they were looking at having it out in Galway. Is there any update as to what that money is being used for and where they're going with it? I'm just wondering what that

amount – I just noticed it in the budget. It was an interesting one.

MR. GARDINER: My understanding, Jim, is that there's \$2.7 million in the budget this year for the francophone school district. That would be a question that's better answered by Transportation and Infrastructure, who hold that file in terms of school construction.

MR. J. DINN: Good enough.

Moving on, with regard to under School Board I guess, since they would also deal with the transportation of schoolchildren, I'm just looking at here at the busing contractors and cleaning of the buses. Any indication or any feedback as to the logistics of that, whether they're finding it difficult to keep the buses clean and maintain the routes? Any thought then to maybe having monitors on board who would take care of that as well?

MR. GARDINER: We haven't heard anything in terms of any challenges that it's presented.

MR. J. DINN: With the School Board Operations is there also – and I don't know if I brought this up or not; it seems like I have but I'm sure I haven't. With regard to disinfectant fogging machines, is there any attempt – I know that we use them here in the House of Assembly now. I know the Independent School does use it in my district. It's provided one for its cleaning staff. I know a number of the post-secondary private colleges also have it.

Is there any consideration, considering the large surface area and the number of students, especially in larger schools, to at least purchase these for the cleaning staff or provide funding to the district so that they can keep the schools clean as part of their protocol?

MR. GARDINER: As I mentioned before, the funding has been provided to the school district for custodians and cleaning. Now, how they spend that money, in terms of whether it is aerosol sprayers or other types of cleaners, it's certainly something they can speak to.

MR. J. DINN: If they came back and said we can't afford this but we think it's necessary, is

that something then that the government would be willing to consider to support?

MR. GARDINER: We'd obviously consider any request from the district.

MR. J. DINN: Okay.

The five new Public Health nurses – and I know this might be better under Health, but I'm just wondering because this is part of the plan of Safe Return to School, of how they're being deployed or how they're working to help the schools. A part of the concern I know over the years was that the duties of the Public Health nurses have expanded to take on more duties and they have less time to devote to schools.

I'm just wondering where these five nurses are and how they're being deployed in relation to the schools?

MR. GARDINER: So you're right, that's a question best answered by Health and Community Services. They will be, to my knowledge, employed by the regional health authorities. That's to be confirmed but, again, Health and Community Services can certainly confirm that.

I do know that the regional health authorities have reached out to the school district, various regional offices and started a conversation in terms of a plan and in terms of deployment of those Public Health resources within the schools.

MR. J. DINN: Okay and was there any consideration as to how the number, five, was chosen, in terms of needs I'm looking at here. I ask this from the point of view of one school counsellor I was speaking to trying to get a nurse right now. Even now with the extra units, what they're being told is we just don't have the time. I'm just trying to get an idea of how that number was selected, that number of nurses.

MR. GARDINER: That was done basically to address the region-by-region perspective. Given that Eastern would be so big we would anticipate two in Eastern, one in Central, one in Western and one in Labrador.

MR. J. DINN: Okay, I'll probably come back to that, whether now or later on, but I'm just

thinking whether five is an adequate number, considering the geography of this province and the concentration of the population.

MR. GARDINER: I agree but you need to keep in mind now that's five, in addition to what would've already been in place.

MR. J. DINN: I appreciate that but I think also the fact is that certainly in my own career, the presence of the school nurse certainly decreased significantly, even to the point where basic things such as inoculations and checking for head lice became the duty of the school staff and not the nurse itself.

OHS resources for the school district: There is an amount budgeted for OHS in resources in the Safe Return to School. I'm just trying to figure out what these resources are and how is the amount allocated. I'm just looking at what that will look like on the ground in our schools when it looks at the additional OHS resources. Is that for extra meetings or what?

MR. GARDINER: That would certainly be something that the school district could speak to. We provided them an extra \$350,000 to ensure adequate occupational health and safety requirements were met. That's something that they would be able to speak to.

MR. J. DINN: I notice in certain – it has to do with plexiglass barriers right now. I know that I think it's one of the First Nations in Northern Saskatchewan; they actually employed plexiglass barriers for all teachers. I'm just wondering, considering the nature of teaching, especially the one-on-one aspect of it – and I know that there are a number of teachers who had respiratory problems pre-COVID – has the department or the district looked at providing plexiglass for teachers in schools so that they can engage in that one-to-one personalized learning, where needed, as a precautionary approach.

MR. OSBORNE: Jim, for the itinerant teachers there are plexiglass barriers provided within the schools that they can use, if they're going from school to school. For teachers who are immunocompromised, they have been encouraged to apply for those resources on a case-by-case basis. They'll be viewed by the

English School District and the administrator within the school and a determination made as to whether those would be supplied.

We've had conversations with the English School District about the need for barriers; we've had discussions with the chief medical officer of health. The use of face masks in normal face-to-face – the same as you and I speaking here in the Legislature. For normal in-class instruction, if there are no immunocompromised issues and so on, face masks are considered to be acceptable.

MR. J. DINN: Thank you, Minister.

I guess the conversations that we might have here are probably going to be a little bit different than if I'm sitting at eye level to a student at the desk, sometimes having more than five-minute conversations. What I'm gathering is that there is some attempt here to at least recognize that teachers may need to have – and they may not be immunocompromised but they may very well be of a certain age where they're in a risk category or overweight and so on and so forth.

Thank you.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you, Mr. Dinn, for now.

Mr. Lane, please.

MR. LANE: Yes, I just had a couple of quick questions.

On the curriculum side of things, I'm just wondering are we – and this is a quick yes or no. I don't know if we're doing it or not. These are some things that have come up in recent years. They were talked about; I don't know if they happened.

Are we doing anything in our schools in terms of civics for students, understanding different levels of government, how to vote, what different levels do and this kind of stuff?

MR. GARDINER: Mr. Lane, yes, that would be something that would be covered off in various aspects of the social studies curriculum right throughout K to 12. That is also something that's being interwoven in the new career course. Part of that would be financial literacy,

as well as civics, in the new course that's being introduced in high school next year.

MR. LANE: Okay.

I guess that answers my second question because I was going to ask about money management and so on. So financial literacy, that's good. Excellent.

The last question about curriculum: Is there anything – I know zero about this but coding. I hear talks about the need – as we move forward, that coding is going to be an important thing. I have no idea what it even looks like, to be honest with you.

Obviously, it's what makes computer programs work, but there's some talk that should be happening at a younger age to get kids introduced to that because it's going to be part of the future. Is that something that's being looked at?

MR. GARDINER: That's something that's more than just being looked at; that's something that's being done. Coding shows up throughout the curriculum in various places, in particular in the intermediate and high school.

Just a couple of years ago we entered a partnership with Brilliant Labs, which is a New Brunswick company. They have a significant footprint in the province right now and, again, a big emphasis on K to 6, but they also spill into the intermediate programming as well. I think the last number I saw they were into 70 per cent of the schools in the province. They actually have a site set up here now on Strawberry Marsh Road in the district school that schools can actually visit. But significant footprint in the province in terms of Brilliant Labs. Also, The Learning Partnership has a coding program that we also partner with them on as well. But Brilliant Labs would be, certainly, the biggest footprint in the province for coding.

MR. LANE: Okay, that's good to hear.

I just wanted to make a quick comment, as well, that I absolutely support the notion that my colleague – well, both of my colleagues actually raised about this buffer that's created by school boards. When you look at where we're to

financially in this province, up to our neck in debt, we need to find ways of being more efficient and perhaps some of those resources, in addition to that, could be put into having better student-teacher ratios and so on. I just wanted to say I support that notion as we do our review. The Minister of Finance has said that there are going to be more efforts in the next budget to look at things we can do to create efficiencies, and I would support that notion.

A quick question back on the busing. I'm just wondering: Has the issue of courtesy seating now been addressed? Because I've heard from some parents that they haven't heard anything on the courtesy seats.

MR. OSBORNE: The school administrators have the ability to assign courtesy seating once all eligible students have been looked after. As we know, it was last week before the final school got the busing for eligible students. Courtesy seating has been in the process of being assigned as schools got eligible students looked after. So it's still in process as schools are being resolved.

MR. LANE: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chair, I'm just wondering, this goes right to 3.6.01, does it not, or ...?

CHAIR: That's correct.

MR. LANE: So the child care, daycares would be under this?

CHAIR: Yes.

MR. LANE: Yeah. A couple of quick questions.

I'm just wondering, the \$25-a-day child care, first question, as some people have asked: Why is it universal and that there is no means test? Basically somebody could be a millionaire, so to speak, and get subsidized daycare for their children.

MR. OSBORNE: There's no means test for K to 12 either.

MR. LANE: Okay, fair enough. It's an answer. It's been asked.

How is the \$25 a day going to work? Does the government pay the daycare? Do the parents pay the daycare \$25 and then the daycare has to depend on the government to get the rest of the money? How is that going to work?

MR. OSBORNE: The amount charged to parents will be reduced through the Operating Grant Program. So 70 per cent of regulated daycares right now operate under the Operating Grant Program, they receive a subsidy and the subsidy will be increased.

MR. LANE: Okay. The parents would pay \$25 to the daycare and the daycare would get the rest of the money from the government.

MR. OSBORNE: Yes.

MR. LANE: Okay.

I guess the last question or concern under daycare. I've heard from a couple of operators in my district, for sure, that there are a number of non-regulated daycares, people operating out of their homes and so on. That's an option for a lot of families because a lot of times they tend to be more flexible in terms of right next door in the neighbourhood, picking the kids up for school, walking them to school, stuff that a regular daycare is not necessarily – varying hours of dropping them off and picking them up that a normal daycare may not have that same flexibility. But this \$25 a day, if it doesn't apply to them then it may force parents to look at the other option and thus put those other entities, I guess, out of business. There are a lot of these home daycares that have depended on this to support their families for years and years and now that's all at risk.

On their behalf, or at least a couple in my district that have reached out to me, they're wondering: Is there any opportunity, whatsoever, to have them included? I do understand that they could become a regulated daycare but then there are issues with – if you're operating out of your house, having extra washrooms on each floor and all this kind of stuff, there are different things that make that very difficult to do. They're asking: Is there anything that can be done to include them?

MR. OSBORNE: It's important that any operation that receives the Operating Grant that government know that they are being operated safely, that they have standards in place and that they meet the protocols that government have put in place for children. The only people that we can really provide the Operating Grant to are regulated operators.

Even with the Operating Grant that we provide currently, 30 per cent of regulated daycares have opted not to take that Operating Grant. Under the Operating Grant today, pre-schoolers are only \$30, they will become \$25; toddlers are \$33, they will become \$25; and infants are \$44, so they will become \$25. But in regulated daycares that don't opt into the Operating Grant Program, some of them are as high as \$64.

MR. LANE: Okay. All right, thank you.

If somebody is getting a subsidy, because there are some families that get subsidies based on their incomes and so on, which reduces their cost to daycare and some get it, I guess, totally paid for and others maybe proportionately. If I'm already getting a subsidy to a certain amount, will that be \$25 a day less my subsidy? So it's going to be even lower than it was. Or is it like, if my subsidized seat was \$25 already, well, I'm not getting anything else? If that makes sense to you.

MR. OSBORNE: Nobody will be negatively impacted. If somebody is going to a regulated daycare that receives the Operating Grant, they're also receiving a subsidy, they're paying zero or somewhere between zero and \$30, for example, for a pre-schooler. They won't be negatively impacted. The most they will pay is \$25.

MR. LANE: No. Minister, my question, though – and this is my last question. My question was: If I was paying \$30, right, because I'm getting a subsidy, but now you're saying the most is \$25, so would it go down to \$25? Or would you say: You're getting a subsidy of \$20, and it is \$25 a day so now you only have to pay \$5 because we're going to continue to give you your subsidy on top of the fact that it is a \$25-a-day daycare? Do you know what I'm saying?

CHAIR: Mary Goss-Prowse.

MS. GOSS-PROWSE: The subsidy program will continue predominately because there will still be services that are regulated that decide not to go with the \$25 a day or with the Operating Grant. They will still get the same level of subsidy that they always did. Families that are in Operating Grant centres who are receiving a subsidy now will still get a subsidy. If they're paying anything, they won't pay any more under this process. In fact, in some cases they may pay a little bit less, depending on what their parent fee was, after the subsidy.

MR. LANE: That's what I was asking. Would they get the advantage of this so they pay less actually?

MS. GOSS-PROWSE: Oh, absolutely. We'll adjust the subsidy program to fit the new fees.

MR. LANE: Thank you.

That's it.

CHAIR: Any further questions from Mr. Pardy or Mr. Dinn?

MR. J. DINN: On this section?

CHAIR: Yes, on this section.

Mr. Pardy.

MR. PARDY: If I may just bounce back to 3.3.01, and I promise only forward after this. Professional Services, approximately \$65,000. I just wanted to know where the Professional Services tie in to 3.3.01, Student Support Services. There's less spent there, Bob.

MR. GARDINER: Yes. Craig, that was money for the professional learning that we had budgeted for teaching and learning assistants that we had hoped would happen over the summer, but it didn't happen over the summer. Because it didn't happen over the summer, then it would have come from a different budget line. It would have come from the substitute teacher budget line.

MR. PARDY: Okay, good.

3.4.01, an increase in the Salaries, actual over budget of last year.

MR. GARDINER: The increase last year would have been for severance payout and the slight increase this year would be for the 27 pay periods.

MR. PARDY: Okay.

We talked last year of a new provincial assessment model. I'm assuming it is this year. If I'm not mistaken, I think that may have been referenced last year for this year.

MR. GARDINER: The plan was that we would have our first administration of the new provincial assessment this past school year, but because of COVID it didn't happen.

MR. PARDY: Okay.

MR. GARDINER: Right now we are still anticipating that we will have it at the end of this school year, but, again, that's contingent on how the school year unfolds, obviously.

MR. PARDY: This new provincial one mirrors which other provinces? Many others?

MR. GARDINER: It would mirror the international PESA as well as the national Pan-Canadian Assessment Program. It would be similar to what currently Alberta and a number of other provinces do as well.

MR. PARDY: Good, thank you.

3.5.01, just ask the question: Why wouldn't those regulated child care providers take the subsidy? Why would they not? I can't come up with a reason. I would assume that they would all take the subsidy. Didn't you reference that? You probably just raised the hypothetical that some may not take the subsidy.

CHAIR: Minister.

MR. OSBORNE: I'm not sure, Craig, why some of them haven't opted in. Now that the amount of the subsidy is increasing to further reduce the cost, I imagine more of them will opt in. But there will probably still be regulated child care centres that for whatever reason choose not to take advantage of the Operating Grant.

MR. PARDY: What would be the biggest obstacle in those non-regulated providers, why they wouldn't opt to be regulated? I know there's a set criteria, and if my memory serves me correctly, I think you're talking about an office available, the number of windows. Would those be conditions that would prevent someone who is a non-regulated provider from becoming regulated?

MR. OSBORNE: Some of the non-regulated would probably meet all the standards today to be able to become regulated. We are encouraging non-regulated who feel that they would meet the standards to get regulated and be able to take advantage of the Operating Grant. There are some non-regulated, obviously, that wouldn't meet the standards. We don't know because we don't inspect them; they're non-regulated. We don't even know how many of them there are. But anybody who is non-regulated who would like to become regulated, we encourage them to explore that possibility.

CHAIR: Bob Gardiner.

MR. GARDINER: Just to make sure everyone understands, when we say non-regulated child care, we don't have child care centres out there with 50 children in them that are not regulated. Non-regulated, you must have four or fewer children. Typically, that would be in someone's house. If you have more than four students, then you are supposed to be regulated.

MR. PARDY: Do we have an early childhood education program or, in the layman's terms, a daycare in one of our K-to-12 schools that currently have space? And we have many that currently have space. Do we have any that operate within our 260 schools?

MR. GARDINER: I think of Waterford Valley High where there's a child care centre in that school. Now do they have vacancies? I don't know the answer to that Craig.

MR. PARDY: That would be the only one, Bob, to your knowledge?

MR. GARDINER: No, I'm not sure. Mary, would you know of ones that are in schools?

MS. GOSS-PROWSE: We currently have two that are directly funded through government and one on the West Coast that is now operated by a not-for-profit group on that side of the Island. Those three are in high schools. We also have numerous after-school programs through such organizations as the Y and some private operators who operate after-school and before-school programs in many schools. In terms of preschools, there are probably under five, I would say.

MR. PARDY: I think the importance of the early childhood education – we don't need to go through research, but we know how important and how critical that is. If we can't vouch for the quality of what's occurring out in our province, and if it's critical that we get them before three years of age – I don't mean get them, but if we work with them to make sure they're exposed to quality programming, then we have to step up and do something a little different. To think that we could have people out there and they remain unregulated and we can't assure what the quality would be.

I would love to see the universal early childhood education utilize the schools that we currently have in areas that we have and make sure that we have the quality programming which we know will benefit the K-to-12 system and the post-secondary thereafter.

I would think, from the District of Bonavista – and if I looked – that we have available space in our schools, but to think that in the District of Bonavista there's not one daycare in either one of those schools which has capacity to offer it in that district. I know you can't do it everywhere, but I would assume that let's make inroads to provide it in the existing space that we have and ensure that we do offer quality.

When the federal government did the National Progress Report of the bilateral agreements that they did with the provinces, one thing that stuck out in my mind when they were doing the report and the progress was that they had achievements and they had a category of achievements that were listed for every province. We signed on, I think, in that bilateral agreement. Maybe it was December 2017, Mary, maybe? The only thing I saw unique with us in Newfoundland and Labrador was that in our progress report, the

only jurisdiction in the rest of the country, it didn't say achievements, it said anticipated achievements.

That struck me to wonder: Why would anticipated be there? But I think that we were looking at doing something within the quality plan in probably '18-'19. Would I be correct in that? Why would we be under the heading anticipated achievements?

MS. GOSS-PROWSE: It was due to the late signing of the bilateral within that fiscal year. That report that you're referring to is the one for '17-'18 and because it wasn't signed until December of '17-'18, and there were programs to develop and policies to get developed, we didn't actually get a lot of programs out the door within that three-month period. So it's been getting them up and running and out the door.

We did find ways, through the Capital Renovation Grant, to benefit child care centres with the funding in a one-time benefit in order to reduce waivers under the current regulations and those kinds of things. We didn't not spend the money; we just didn't get those particular programs out the door before that report would end.

MR. PARDY: Mary, may I ask you one quick question?

MS. GOSS-PROWSE: Sure.

MR. PARDY: When I came to the House last year, on the Order Paper was junior kindergarten and I'm a big supporter of junior kindergarten and I kept waiting for it all of last year but it didn't happen. Where are we with junior kindergarten?

CHAIR: Minister.

MR. OSBORNE: Work is progressing on that. This \$25-a-day daycare took priority, but work is progressing on junior kindergarten.

CHAIR: Okay, thank you very much.

Given the time, I believe the minister has spoken to a few of the Committee Members that he does have a previous engagement, so we're going to need to reschedule. There's still quite a bit of

information to do, so we will pause here because I think there are still outstanding questions on these sections, looking around. We will pause and, Mr. Dinn, we will come back to you.

In the meantime, I do need to refer you to the minutes of our previous meeting. They have been distributed to the Committee Members, so I need someone to move, please, that the minutes be adopted.

MR. LOVELESS: So moved.

CHAIR: Thank you, MHA Loveless.

All those in favour of these minutes, 'aye.'

SOME HON. MEMBERS: Aye.

CHAIR: All those against, 'nay.'

The minutes are carried.

On motion, minutes adopted as circulated.

CHAIR: The Clerk will be back in touch with you now regarding a time when we can come back and complete both this section and the remaining sections of Estimates.

With that, I will seek a motion to adjourn. The date and time of the next meeting –

CLERK: (Inaudible.)

CHAIR: Oh, I'm sorry. That's right.

Our next meeting of the Social Services sector is Wednesday, October 7 at 1730, 5:30 p.m.

Thank you very much.

I need a motion to adjourn, please.

MR. BENNETT: So moved.

CHAIR: MHA Bennett.

Thank you very much and thank you for your attention.

On motion, the Committee adjourned.